

THIS BUSINESS OF SINGING

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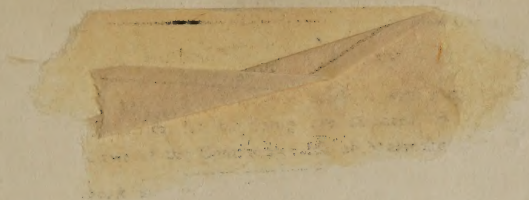
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THIS BUSINESS OF SINGING

By PIERRE KEY

Editor MUSICAL DIGEST • PIERRE KEY'S MUSIC
YEAR BOOKS • PIERRE KEY'S MUSICAL WHO'S WHO

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I N T R O D U C T I O N

1.

I can think of nothing in the music field which enlists a wider interest than singing and singers. It touches virtually every home and fireside—largely for the excellent reason that most people can manage, in some fashion, to sing. It may be nothing beyond an attempt at some tune, to the accompaniment of splashing water, during the morning bath; yet, whether it be that or something more formal, song is very much part and parcel of the average human being. Unlike the instrumentalist, who must acquire a considerable technique before he can really play, nearly everyone can sound vocally-made pitches. Whoever is moved to lift his voice in song may, regardless of possible irritation to the discriminating listener, indulge that diversion at his pleasure.

Consequently, and since every song is set to a text that conveys a definite message, the number of people who respond to singing is beyond calculation. All of which causes the singer to be the most easily understood and appreciated of all music-makers.

In common with many others of my earlier days I was impelled to sing. At the outset all serious singing and singers, professional and amateur alike, appealed to me.

While it was my privilege to hear most of the greatest of that time, I nevertheless derived enjoyment and some profit from listening to those who sang for sheer love of singing, as well as in hearing others who were in various stages of their progress towards hoped-for careers.

Along with the majority, I was not long in discovering weaknesses in my own endeavors to sound certain pitches. Where portions of a song would go after a fashion, other portions offered technical obstacles that proved prohibitive barriers. As time passed I progressed to a point permitting a fair control on lower and medium pitches; but the moderately high and extreme high ones found me groping uncertainly. While I could sound those pitches, I never was physically comfortable in so doing. I was conscious of throat-constriction, yet unable to remedy the fault. The quality, too, was not as agreeable as the quality of the lower tones. In short, I was always doubtful over what would come off in the less dependable portion of my voice; and that feeling of anxiety scarcely helped matters.

If I was no worse off than some of my acquaintances who studied because of their desire to sing well, I was little better. We were pretty much of a kind, our voices being regarded as above the average, and some of our accomplishments such that they did not justify being completely sneezed at. But an inability to do the thing really well made me all the more determined to find out the why. It could be made a fascinating hobby. As a consequence I fell to seeking out illustrious artists, and ask-

ing questions. The habit of reading whatever I could lay hands on touching singing technique also became fixed; and no day seemed profitable which did not yield a chat with some person from whom I felt I might learn.

It wasn't long before I discovered how diverse can be the views concerning the technical side of singing. Such of my acquaintances as had aspirations for careers debated disputed points. Each championed his own teacher's cause, and yet—the recognition gained by the most talented was modest. Gradually I came to ponder the restraining causes. Lack of voice scarcely could be one; I heard plenty of naturally-fine voices. There was also apparent a fair amount of interpretive talent among these young career-seekers; some had good looks, and a few were further fortunate in possessing magnetism. Yet for one and all who appeared publicly and quasi-publicly there was always a 'but' or an 'if.' Along with words of praise for an achievement would come qualifying comments.

It finally became clear to me that a moderate singing talent, an agreeable-sounding voice, and a vitality which is the precious asset of youth, were the chief factors contributing to such successes as these acquaintances of mine were gaining. Equally clear to me, as I pursued further my analyses, was the principal factor that kept the more gifted and personable of this group from being able to pass the gate leading to broader musical fields.

That factor was a failure in certain important technical

respects. A way of using the voice which had neither the smoothness nor the certainty which come when one has mastered a control of the mechanism which is given a person to sing with.

If it wasn't a "throaty" tone, then the drawback was a "breathy" one. You heard tones pinched in the nose; tones "thin" and "white"; hard-driven tones; and tones "hollow" and so lacking in focus as to be barely audible any considerable distance from the spot where the singer stood.

In the years that have followed since I entered upon a journalistic life I have devoted much time to the search for what I knew must exist, namely: a way of using the singing voice that is based on fundamentals so definite that they can be readily comprehended, and, finally mastered, will enable one to sing with physical certainty any sequence of pitches that lie within the natural compass of the voice, on any vowel and consonant, and with every tone free and unconstrained and matching in relative quality every other tone . . . from extreme bottom to extreme top.

I confess that such technical mastery is possessed and used, today, by comparatively few singers . . . even among those who occupy the premier positions. Yet I believe I have discovered the basic elements of that mastery, and how they can be utilized to a much-coveted end.

There will no doubt be inquiries as to reasons which enable singing greatness to be won by artists allegedly deficient in a first rate technique. The inquiry is a

natural one; and easily answered.

Our distinguished singers who occupy the exalted places are almost invariably those having exceptional voices and exceptional interpretive resources. Some are aided by magnetic personalities which figure tremendously in their public acceptance.

I must admit that others, far less generously endowed, will now and again manage a spotlight position without apparent justification for getting there. But that is a circumstance which occurs in any calling, and for which there may be no satisfying explanation. If such a seemingly unwarranted public recognition leaves the experts bewildered, the effect upon the equally competent, and the superior, singers who fare less well can be imagined. All one can say, when pushed for an explanation, is that it is one of those inexplicable "accidents" . . . fortunate for the recognized singer, but discouraging to his equals or betters who are striving for general acceptance.

The probabilities are, when a singer unendorsed by the most critical "clicks" with the public, that he must have a quality or qualities the public likes. He may even have no more than a fair voice which is only fairly well used, yet with musicianship and personality and showmanship put himself across. He may even sing habitually out of tune, and still far exceed in popularity splendid singers whose occasional pitch-deviation will be pounced upon for a scoring.

In the presence of such facts it should be apparent why

the most competent judges hesitate to predict career-possibilities for whoever seeks their opinions. For where a singer may appear to have all the requisites to make a career, experience has proved it to have eluded such a singer's endeavors . . . time and time again.

Nevertheless, the part played in a singing success by the possession of a superior technique is unanimously conceded. Moreover it is supported by the fact that every singer starts by striving to develop such a technique; and that the music reviewers for the public press will comment adversely on an artist's technical shortcomings even while praising the artist's voice and interpretive accomplishments.

Additional evidence which sustains the advantages offered by having a splendid technique is the number of highly successful singers who, aware of their technical shortcomings, strive to correct them.

The factor deterring some thus handicapped from such efforts is a hesitancy to change from long established ways to which they have become accustomed; ways which, whatever they may fail to yield in tonal command and outcome, seem for those singers safe and dependable. Much is to be said in justification of an artist's adhering to what he does technically—so long as he continues in public favor.

I speak of all this because for years I have been the friend of all singers, old and young. It has been my privilege to know many, among them the acknowledged greatest who have come before us during the past thirty

years. Prior to, and during the twelve years I served the late *New York Morning World* as music editor and reviewer, these singers talked frankly with me about matters affecting their singing and their careers; and such confidences have not diminished since I assumed the editorship of various music publications of my own, seventeen years ago.

It is perhaps a natural outcome that, for a long time now, I have been a sort of receiver-general for questions concerning singing, singers, and the singing-career. "What is the best way to sing, technically? . . . Who are the singers safest to serve as models? . . . What resources must one have to achieve a singing success? . . . What steps lead most surely to the ends desired? . . . What are the rewards?"

The foregoing form the gist of the inquiries by those who have singing in mind as a vocation or avocation. Yet it is not by the professionally-minded alone that my views are constantly sought. There is an army of amateurs—and a huge army it is—which is keenly interested in the *how* and the *why* of singing. Which is as it should be. For I know of no reason for being content to do something worth while in other than the most effective manner possible, even though monetary returns and public acclaim are not a special concern. Since joy may be derived from singing for one's own self, it can be made a two-fold joy if it be done so well that, quite apart from the consciousness of excelling, it affords pleasure to others.

It is because of the many above-mentioned inquiries I receive, together with the fact that scarcely a day passes without my being approached in person by someone to whom these matters are vital, that I am persuaded to set down in permanent form some of the results of my studies and investigations in a field which is all the more fascinating by reason of the widely differing opinions concerning its whys and wherefores.

Another cause prompting me to resort to paper and type and ink is the feeling that in laying all the cards involved on the table, and explaining each one, some of the most desirable cards may be chosen by those who may have use for them.

Amazing as are the contradictory assertions touching the *correct* use of the singing voice, it is surprising to find opinions differing so widely with respect to the interpretive side of the art, and, finally (when a career is involved), on the choice of a way which seemingly points to a monetary goal.

That the subject is of major importance becomes evident in the search for guidance or enlightenment, in one or more than one of its aspects, by singers of established position. In these circumstances it is small wonder that so many beginner professionals, along with the army of young men and women who are nearing the threshold of a money-earning start, grope for fundamental truths.

Consequently, the matters demanding consideration separate themselves into three rather broad divisions.

The first has to do with the character and extent of the natural resources of the person who wishes to sing; and whether the goal be for personal gratification alone, or to make singing a profession.

The second division touches the technical and interpretive sides of singing; ways for acquiring a satisfactory "how" of the first, and becoming artistically proficient in the second.

The third division embraces whatever concerns the launching of the career, and much which attaches to it in endeavors to make the career a success.

While the problems connected with the complete subject of singing are many, they may be no more than surround other human activities. We do know, however, that there is much so perplexing, even to those presumably qualified to judge, that furnishing some of the answers may be in order.

Foremost among the factors which operate to make this business of singing no clearly charted affair are the following:

First: That no individual, or group of individuals, thus far has gained an eminence to cause rendered opinions to be accepted everywhere as authoritatively final.

Second: That relatively few persons possess a naturally exceptional and highly developed hearing sense of singing tones, together with the faculty of appraising their music worth and potentialities.

Third: That relatively few persons can identify with

certainly a singer's vocal defects (when they exist) ; and fewer still know what measures will correct such defects, and possess further the knowledge and skill of getting the singer to apply them successfully.

Fourth: That the singer is often unable to judge accurately his own vocal qualities, and his musical qualities; that he may experience an unwarranted satisfaction with his endeavors, and thus prefer approval to criticism of a helpfully meant nature; that he generally is impatient, and disinclined to go slowly . . . the only safe course to pursue if one would learn to sing well.

Fifth: That many are at a loss concerning the source one may turn to for an authoritative and disinterested opinion concerning the degree of the essential requirements for a singing career possessed by a candidate, such as: quality of voice; its probable usefulness, in power and compass; the inherent singing talent; the extent of the musicality; the character of one's determination and persistence; the nature of one's general health; the rating of personal appearance and the personality; and whether the candidate is stimulated or made apprehensive while facing an audience.

Sixth: That ascertaining the character and extent of the competition certain to be encountered, and the chances of successfully meeting that competition (in whatever branch of the intended career desired) are nearly always overlooked.

Seventh: That scant thought is given to launching a

career; the expense of the launching; the problem of selecting a management; and the minimum expense to be expected before even moderate earnings appear likely.

In the chapters that follow I have set forth what impresses me as the substance of what is essential to one having ambitions for a major singing career—whether it be in concert, opera, radio or in all three. I have also pointed out why the amateur should not only be encouraged to sing, but to sing well enough to make the recompense commensurate with the labor and time necessary to acquire such skill.

I pass all this along to whoever may be interested, in the hope that some of the mystifying matters touching singing and singing careers may be clarified; that from these chapters a few things may be gathered of a practically helpful nature.

S I N G I N G F O R F U N

2.

Back of every voluntary effort is a self-gratifying impulse. We generally take on some task for one of three reasons: for the pleasure it affords; because of an inherent desire to excel in whatever is undertaken; or in the hope that it will lead to a money-earning end.

Any one of these motivating impulses is laudable enough, yet the two latter offer more substantial returns. Where it is the purpose to make singing a vocation the effort is invariably serious and sustained. Since singing for cash demands a degree of acceptance, there is no escaping the study and work necessary to make that singing marketable.

No such compelling force is at the elbow of the amateur singer. He is a free agent in the matter. His decision to sing may be due to nothing more than a mild desire to hear his own voice. In such instances the effort may be, is more than likely to be, one of pleasurable indifference. Being easily satisfied, his goal is readily gained. But where one experiences no satisfaction short of a marked ability in the task performed, there can be no slighting the effort to master it.

I have heard the expression, and far too frequently,

"Oh! one mustn't expect too much; he's only an amateur singer."

Now just why one should be excused from failure to do all that is reasonably possible for one to do in music, on the grounds of being an amateur, I never could quite understand. We have innumerable instances of the exceptional credited to amateurs in many fields. So why not expect that in music? . . . Why not expect the exceptional in singing?

There is no justifiable excuse. Not when one meets, as I have met, with proof of what amateurs can do with their voices, and with a song. It becomes a vitally relevant matter, one of solemn importance, when stock is taken of all it means to any branch of human endeavor to have back of it the stimulating support of great numbers of people. When that support is attended by an understanding born of being able to perform well in that branch, we then find conditions ideal for its fullest blossoming.

The United States and Canada are two nations blessed in many ways. One is in the appreciation and support of the music arts. Still another blessing is the love of song; a love which can represent the outpouring of full hearts, perhaps indirectly expressing joy in nature's gifts that have made life in these countries yield the utmost known to mankind.

While song is a medium for denoting sadness, we know it best as a medium for expressing love and joy. On every weekday millions of our young pupils in the grade and sec-

ondary schools of this country lift their voices happily in song. Hundreds of thousands of adult members of choruses and choral societies sing because they love to sing. We finally have additional thousands who prefer solo singing—in most cases because their voices are either better than commonplace or are thought to be. Whether a singing voice is actually superior to the average, or only slightly so, getting it to do the utmost possible would seem highly desirable. For then, and then only, can one derive gratification in that degree which comes only from a consciousness of being able to do some one thing better than ordinarily well.

What any nation needs, for its fullest development in the music arts, is to have its respective branches practised extensively in the home. To have members of a family gather often in the evenings, or on a free afternoon, for an hour or so of music. Music of one kind or another: part of it the playing of pianoforte compositions by the pianist of the family; another bit given to a violin solo; further portions devoted to some chamber music for string quartet, quintet, trio or sonata for piano and violin, or 'cello . . . with a song or two by the singer-member of the family fitting into its proper place.

We need more of that sort of thing; less of turning to some mechanical means for our good music in the home. I do not decry what the radio and the phonograph offer in the way of good music. Each medium has its values, and they are many. But to depend upon them to the virtual

exclusion of actual music-making in the home is as harmful to the development of a people's real understanding of music as it is to the acquiring of a performing proficiency in a creditable degree.

Since singing seems to be the first natural musical act to which most individuals turn, and since the singing of a song in one manner or another is possible without acquiring a wealth of technique, it would appear eminently reasonable to go beyond merely encouraging the desire to sing. Equally important to having large numbers who sing is to expect of the amateur singer an acceptable performance—and to make the recognition-reward one worth attaining.

Somehow, in that mysterious fashion which eludes fathoming, there is given to one who sings for sheer love of it a recompense beyond casual estimate. It can be as water to a parched throat; the freeing of tugging emotions by some gently understanding touch. I always find myself listening sympathetically to the singing of a song by an amateur (no matter how falteringly done). Whether an utterance from one who is young, or middle-aged, or elderly, this yielding to the urge to sing has always impressed me as significant of some finer quality from within that seeks an outlet.

Consequently—rather than attempting to discourage inferior endeavors at song, suggestions that can lead to improvement would seem a more practical (and gracious) act. For to stifle in another the desire to sing, no matter how subtly done, can be the unintentional cause of much

subsequent unhappiness.

What is needed, by many of the innumerable amateurs who turn happily to song, is encouragement to keep on with their singing. Encouragement—plus getting them to realize the self-satisfaction which attends any really superior accomplishment. The mere fact that they are singing for fun, rather than for money, is neither reason nor excuse for doing anything short of the best that lies within their ability to do. This trait (or mental awakening, where it is not natural in one) is responsible for the proficiency gained by a considerable number of amateurs I know; men and women, both, who have learned to sing so well that they might have had careers had they been so minded. It is the influence exerted by this select group which now and again sheds a radiance for their less accomplished confrères—that is heartening for the ultimate vocal and esthetic betterment of the majority.

I want to hear, and I expect ultimately to hear, a more widespread improvement in the quality of singing among amateur solo singers: excellent vocalism and excellent interpretations to such a degree that the result will approximate what we are accustomed to from a goodly number of our “acceptable” professionals. I mean, by all this, a marked increase all through the United States and Canada in the number of those who sing well enough to elicit sincerely meant praise from those qualified to bestow it.

Miss A, who has a voice of pleasing natural quality and tries it out in an occasional song, decides one fine day

to "take lessons." All too often she believes an "inexpensive" teacher will do at the start; and almost as often the selection proves not to have been for the best. It isn't that *all* teachers who make a moderate charge for a half-hour or more of instruction are less qualified than their higher-priced brethren; the contrary now and again is true. The point I wish to make is that the importance of choosing "the first" instructor should be based upon what he has to offer rather than on the fee.

I wish I knew the formula by which one could select a competent teacher of singing—for experienced singers no less than for the inexperienced. As I have long since observed, trial and error appears to be the only sure way. What is possible, however, is a suggestion or two that may help. One should accept charily any enthusiastic expressions touching the alleged excellences of one's voice, or promises covering the singing potentialities of the one seeking instruction; in short, whatever impresses as extravagance, either in what is said or the manner of its saying.

Very essential is the choice of a teacher whose personality is congenial. And when the period of study has begun, the pupil should not expect miracles, but be content to go slowly and to coöperate fully with all the teacher desires. Above all, asking to be given a song before a conscientious teacher feels it is safe to do so can hinder one's progress through a faulty use of the voice; a use that can be utterly different from the way it is employed in

vocal exercises. Where there are no marked faults in an amateur singer's voice, a song during the early stages of the study-period may be quite in order.

Patience which is exercised at this time will eventually repay one with interest. Along with patience should go an intelligent consideration of whatever tasks the pupil is asked to perform. Because it sometimes happens that a teacher may, in his eagerness and interest, ask more than he may rightly expect at that particular moment. The pupil should never hesitate, at all times, to ask enlightenment on whatever may not be perfectly clear. Discussion is always proper and in order; and the teacher who reacts willingly to questions and displays no annoyance over what may even seem a trivial inquiry can help the amateur over many a mystifying spot.

When the point is reached which permits singing songs at home, for one's friends as well as oneself, such singing should be approached with due regard for the outcome. Here—as well as at later periods in the progress—should the songs be well within the powers of the amateur. That is, they should not tax the voice in any manner: in having pitches too high to deliver with reasonable comfort; or to so tire the voice that the closing portions cause one to gasp for breath between phrases, and to grip the throat muscles in a way that is not resorted to when the voice is fresh.

The advantages to be derived through singing because of a love for it grow in proportion to the singer's own skill.

As the fully-baked loaf of bread is far more palatable than the half-baked loaf, so does the amateur find his satisfaction in an excellent achievement incomparably beyond his feelings over a fair-to-middling job. It is scarcely possible to overestimate his sense of personal enjoyment in his accomplishments—when he finally attains a fine technical and interpretive status. For he has done something truly important. More than that, he is able to give enjoyment to his listeners. In addition to having gained a cultural asset through his own endeavors, the amateur singer contributes also to his store of health. And, finally, it occasionally happens that one who begins singing as an amateur singer discovers, in his development, a growth unsuspected at the outset or during the early period of his vocal activities which justifies (as has happened in several instances I know) his joining the professional ranks.

That is why, in making a hobby of singing, it may pay well to go in for it with a thoroughness which includes hearing good music other than may be found in song recitals: frequent symphony concerts; the finest instrumental soloists; chamber music, too, as well as worth while choral and operatic performances.

The foregoing are some of the ways in which a superior singing ability may react to the benefit of one who has acquired it. Still another contribution a splendid amateur singer can make to the general cause of humanity is the intelligently bestowed support he can offer for the good of music as an art. For as a skillful performer he

becomes a patron of what is offered the music public; a patron whose sense of discrimination enables him to condemn the inferior and by his approval of what is good to aid in the general understanding and encouragement of what is musically sincere and worthy.

We need, in the United States and Canada, a more outspoken demonstration on the part of music listeners of their likes and dislikes. It is injurious to the cause of the music arts to applaud an inferior effort merely to be polite; positively harmful in misleading a commonplace professional. Such false applause is equally misleading to other members of an audience, who quite often are thus influenced to join in such indiscriminate applause even though they may still be experiencing displeasure with what they have heard.

If ever we are to become nations of true music lovers it is essential that we trust our own sense of hearing; that we be courageous enough to express frankly our reactions, favorable and unfavorable, towards the music and musicians we hear. Because only when we so proceed can we develop the capacity to form opinions which, through practice, will in time become approximately accurate.

It is this practice which the amateur music-maker can help bring about. And he can help not alone through his knowledge gained because of his own music-making abilities but by the influence that knowledge will exert upon the person who enjoys listening to good music, even though he may not make music himself.

SINGING FOR MONEY

3.

Singing for money is, or should be, a very serious business. There are instances where it is not made that; instances wherein the singer is generously endowed with voice and the singing talent, and a degree of self-assurance which carries him safely over imposing obstacles—for a time. But the payment-day is sure, eventually, to follow. The fact that some success may attend such early endeavors does not eliminate the hazards that invariably attach to such a course. Furthermore, it is a course to be avoided by others, even though there may seem to be a corresponding justification to follow suit. Because the cock-sure singer whose equipment has a hidden weakness, or set of weaknesses, is sooner or later bound to expose it at a time when the cost to his future may prove very expensive.

While there is a danger of weakening one's self-confidence by proceeding over-cautiously, it is wise to wait for a relatively important public appearance until there is reasonable assurance that it can be capably done. For there is no denying the effect an audience has upon the great majority who face it in song; an effect which can reduce one's command of the vocal resources to an extent to be fully appreciated only after the experience itself.

Most professionally inclined singers generally start matters by singing in the presence of others while still so young that little thought is given to the outcome—an excellent practice which it is helpful to follow. Only when the point is reached where responsibility figures is such a singer likely to have that responsibility disturb his composure. It should not be taken to mean that this always happens. What is termed “nervousness” (the meaning being apprehension) is by no means felt by everyone even during the beginnings of a career. Where a feeling of exhilaration is experienced while singing to an assemblage to an extent that usually leads to doing one’s best, it is a safe assumption that that singer is born for public appearances. However, that attribute is not an essential. Many of our most successful singing artists are apprehensive to the point of being physically nauseated before going on the stage. So, it would appear, the ability to do justice to one’s full technical and interpretive resources can be acquired . . . as it has been in innumerable cases. Frequent informal appearances before people is a helpful factor; the more frequent the better.

Far too many young persons with excellent natural voices decide to prepare for a career without fully weighing the factors involved. Repeated words of praise from sources that count for little all too often furnish the initial desire. In time the value of such praise becomes magnified to the point of becoming the factor which decides the issue. Miss A, or young Mr. B, peers mentally beyond

the horizon at the imaginary picture of a success in concert or opera—if not in both. Radio, too, in these days is an additional lure . . . sometimes the objective held solely in mind.

There is an old saying (attributed to a great artist of a long gone day) that the chief essential for a successful singing career is “voice, more voice, and still more voice.”

In a way, the saying is true. One certainly should have voice, for a career of major dimensions; and in these bounteous days of genuinely fine voices it would be better be an exceptional voice. But voice alone seldom wins, unless it be phenomenal; and it can be even that and still leave its possessor clutching vainly for the choicest prizes, where other “must” requisites for well rounded triumphs are lacking.

So—before decided to enter waters in which it is a feat to keep afloat and make satisfactory headway, it is well to take complete stock of one’s inherent gifts for a singing career.

Since voice is the prime requisite, the first step to be taken is to determine the extent of its plus qualities and usefulness. Assuming the goal to be nothing short of the concert platform or opera stage (one can often do considerable in the church choir and radio without having an exceptional voice), the important question to have settled is the character of the voice itself. First comes its quality! Is it naturally warm and mellow? For the more appealing the quality, the greater its power to charm the listener.

Next in order of importance is the character of the voice; because a voice must have a certain degree of power, of bigness, to carry a real richness. There are exceptions, of course; as with coloratura sopranos who have unusually lovely tones which are naturally round even though not large; and in instances of lyric tenors whose thread-like tones have a soothing sort of beauty that can be highly effective in certain types of songs.

But it usually is advantageous—along with an arresting voice quality—to be able to give a fairly voluminous tone. It need not be of “dramatic” fibre (indeed, the true “dramatic” soprano, mezzo-soprano, contralto, tenor or baritone is extremely rare—almost all basses have a fair amount of vocal substance). But we have plenty of men’s and women’s voices which, though genuinely “lyric,” have abundant power for music that calls for a goodly amount of voice. Therefore, if in addition to a quality which gives marked pleasure to the hearer a voice has sufficient power to be effective in a good sized auditorium, it is a real asset.

The third essential in a voice (it takes rank with a certain degree of power, and may even supersede it in importance—for certain kinds of professional singing) is compass. What are the natural limits of the voice, above and below? Do they reach two octaves? For they should. Can you sustain, with reasonable comfort (no matter how, technically, you do so) the high pitches which are expected from one having your particular type of

voice? Can you, if you are a lyric or a dramatic soprano, do a top-C even if it be not perfectly delivered? If you are a tenor, does the thought of attacking and holding for several beats a high B-flat scare you? Moreover, there are occasions when top Cs, and even Ds, may be demanded of full-voiced sopranos; with B-naturals and now and again a high-C for tenors.

The baritone who chokes on a high-G will find the going hard until he can project it with certainty; and there will be times, if he be a true baritone (not a bass-baritone) when he may have to do a high A-flat. Bassos with reasonably free upper pitches always are at a premium . . . provided their lower tones are solid and full.

As for the mezzo-sopranos and contraltos—the toppier their natural voices the more likely are they to be in demand . . . providing they have all else which is required for the music they must sing in whatever field they enter.

Vocal endurance is another essential for a major career, whether it is to lie in concert or opera. But if it be the latter, that endurance must be of a pronounced order naturally, despite the fact that training and a technically fine use of the voice will frequently bring what it may have been impossible to attain at an earlier period with an imperfect use of the voice. Acquiring a free and splendid technique will also work wonders in extending the compass of voices which are faultily produced—whether those are faults prevailing during the earlier stages of

training, or career, or after the career is well along.

Assuming, then, that several experts qualified to make the verdict a safe one have endorsed the career-candidate's voice as fine enough to justify becoming a professional, what other qualifications must he have?

I place musicality high on the list; a natural feeling for the phrase, which of course includes a pronounced sense of rhythm. Having that, and "an inherent talent" for song, then—with a fine voice—a career may be looked full in the eye.

Still, one may have all the foregoing assets and yet, lacking health, find the desired goal impossible to reach. For one who is subject to too-frequent colds will sooner or later discover unreliability to be an expensive companion. A voice that can be depended upon presupposes good health, a part of which is a throat and nose which are in a normal state most of the time, in all sorts of weather, and climates.

Closely following the foregoing qualities, which are necessary parts of the professional singer's resources, should come patience and persistence—patience to achieve all that must be achieved in the development and control of the voice; of learning what one has to learn musically; and a persistence sufficient to keep one pushing on, despite the many trials certain to arise in any large endeavor.

Musicianship, or the ability to sing in a musicianly manner, is another requisite the candidate for a singing career must either have or acquire. If he is unable to play piano

fairly well (a manifest advantage) or the violin, or both piano and violin (a two-fold advantage), then he will find it a great help to be able to read music moderately well at sight. He will be further strengthened in his resources if he has at least a speaking acquaintance with harmony. But if he be so unfortunate as to have none of these qualifications, he must at least learn to sing his music so that he can go absolutely in time; to give proper values to every note and rest; and to become proficient in that musical "give and take" which forms the basis for the ebb and flow that aids in endowing music with its life and color. To be able to increase or decrease the tempo artistically at a proper place; to swell or diminish the power of the tone without exaggeration; to emphasize a certain note with nicety; to put just the right touch to a musical embellishment—all these facilities call for a skill which takes time and much practice to acquire in a high degree, even where one is endowed with genuine musicality. The value of being a "musician" (rare, indeed, among singers) is immeasurably helpful in learning music, something which may be demanded of the professional singer at a most unexpected moment; and woe unto him who finds himself not a "quick study."

One more quality which must go on the list of essentials for the singing-career candidate is a retentive memory. I know of instances where it has been an absent factor without causing music smash-ups; still, that danger is ever at the elbow of whoever is forgetful, particularly so during

a public appearance.

Then there is the matter of languages. A recitalist should have some familiarity with German, French and Italian. Where opera is the intended field, an ability to converse in German, or in Italian and French, is almost obligatory.

An unfamiliarity with the language in which one is singing is a notable handicap. Even a parrot-like ability can never be unfailingly dependable to pronounce with an acceptable accent words in a language with which the singer has not even a bowing acquaintance. So it becomes evident that the candidate with pretentious operatic ambitions who cannot speak fluently the language in which he is to sing should at least be able to understand what is said in that language.

I am frequently asked the length of time generally required to prepare for a singing career; and how long, after the career has begun, one must expect to wait before a real earning-period is reached. Supplementing these questions come others touching on the expense involved—for both the student days, and the pioneer stage of the career.

No satisfactory answer is possible to any of the foregoing questions, because every case at issue is an individual case. Much depends on the natural endowments with which the career-candidate has to start, and upon the candidate's age at that start. Where one person, under excellent instruction, will accomplish astonishing things in

a year of conscientious and diligent study another will require twice or three times that time to attain corresponding results. Most singers who are doing well in their professions reached the money-earning beginnings only after several years of study. From three to four years is the least time required to attain a moderate singing ability, when the most propitious conditions of every sort prevail. But to reach the advanced singing stage short of six to seven years is most exceptional.

So many factors are involved that predicting success for a career-candidate must always be a speculative matter. Difficult enough, even when the singer seemingly is ready for the public, it should be apparent that any attempt to do so in the case of a singer who is starting his student period, or who has studied for a year or two, becomes hazardous in the extreme.

In view of these inescapable facts any estimate as to the expense involved must go beyond mere arithmetic. Even where addition and multiplication alone figure, the cost items vary to an amazing degree. For they depend on such matters as the expense of lessons, of the manner in which one elects to live, and much else touching what is basically imperative during the student period.

Lightening the expense is possible where a scholarship can be obtained; or payment for lessons with a private teacher may be deferred where the student's professional prospects are estimated by the teacher as warranting his being willing to wait for what becomes due him until

the student begins to earn money. There are girls' clubs, too, in the large centers which offer living accommodations at a cost considerably under other living costs where the independence is greater; and young men also can sometimes manage to save in this respect.

When the moment arrives which justifies a professional launching, several thousand dollars can easily have been expended during the years required to carry the student to that point—even where rigid economy may have been practiced. What the cost can be to launch and promote the career up to its profit-yielding point I will consider in a later chapter.

There are two other factors concerned with a singing career which frequently are the determining factors in succeeding or failing. These are one's personal appearance and one's personality (for, make no mistake in the matter, the latter differs utterly from the former). Attractive features and a well moulded figure are important assets, for a man as well as a woman. But when the candidate also has that indefinable quality we call magnetism, when there is animation, ease, and poise in countenance and gesture and bearing, the case for the plaintiff becomes very propitious, indeed. It can even atone for vocal or musical shortcomings to an extent (as experience has proved) that has brought approving recognition from the public in a degree denied such a singer's competitors who, from vocal and musical standpoints, were his superiors.

SOME TECHNICAL FUNDAMENTALS

4.

The title appearing directly above is likely to arouse interest. There will be those whose curiosity will scarcely rest content until a check-up discloses to what extent these fundamentals coincide with, or vary from, their respective sets of fundamentals. But there will be plenty of others who are as yet uncertain about the principles on which a consistently dependable singing technique can be reared.

To avoid any possible misunderstanding, let it be made clear that while the writer believes firmly that the technical fundamentals he advocates are basically correct he recognizes that there are admirable singers who modify, in one way or another, some of these fundamentals. In other words, while *form* is a staunch ally in any physical endeavor, it is a widely demonstrated fact that violators of *form* are occasionally among the most successful in their particular fields.

As it is true of the swimmer who adapts the crawl stroke to fit his own bodily conformation, to the sprinter who modifies *form* in his striding to suit best the character of his legs, so can a singer acquire an effective command of his voice even though he violate some of the procedure held to be safest for the majority.

One singer, for example, will deliver resonant, mellow and free tones on high pitches with a much smaller opening of the mouth than is possible to others. Another, taking breath high and supporting also the weight imposed by the shoulders, finds no special difficulty in gaining effects beyond the powers of one to whom such breath-taking and control would unfailingly bring a tight, pinched sound.

Admittedly, then, there are several ways to proceed from New York's Fifty-seventh Street and Seventh Avenue to Times Square other than straight down Seventh Avenue. While more circuitous paths can lead to the same objective, the more direct course not only would appear the more sensible one but more profitable in the saving of time necessary for the journey.

What most students of vocal technique find so confusing is the wide diversity of opinion which prevails (among singers and teachers alike) concerning how the cat is to be skinned. There is a virtually unanimous agreement that the tone should be *free*, that it should be *up and forward*, well concentrated, and that the tones should *match* one another throughout the scale. It is when *the best* way to attain all this arises for consideration that the doctors disagree. And they can, and do, disagree just as positively with respect to what they *hear*, for where one group of adjudged experts will declare a voice to be well produced, another group will be equally outspoken in condemning what their colleagues have approved.

It would therefore seem that this matter of *hearing* resolves itself into one of relative keenness. Where one sprinter can run a hundred yards in ten seconds, another finds his fastest possible time to be eleven flat. And this means nothing other than the degree of one's sensitivity to appraise the pitch accuracy, quality, and power of each tone he hears. As A runs faster than B, so does C hear with greater accuracy than D.

At no time in history have the United States and Canada been richer in singing voices and singing talent than today. If one excepts those stars of foreign nations, it is doubtful if any other one nation can offer an aggregate that occupies more noteworthy places in concert and opera, and on pretentious radio programs, than our home-grown-and-developed talent. Recent years have brought such a definite growth in this respect that a natural inquiry is to what this growth may be attributed.

The question is not easily answered, if indeed a satisfying answer is possible. Perhaps one of the elements leading to this rise of promising singers is the increased interest in singing; in the persistent endeavors of our young men and women to excel in large ways. Another stimulating and helpful factor may have come in the search for *the perfect* singing technique, a search which has brought some excellent instruction into the foreground.

And yet—despite this array of fine voices, some inherently fine singing ability, and considerable professional accomplishment—we still meet with too little in the way

of a consistently superior vocal technique. The *perfectly equalized* scale from bottom to top, the free and unhampered delivery of tones in every degree of power, coupled with an ability to sing any sequence of pitches on any vowel and consonant, are technical accomplishments as rare today as in the so-called golden era of song.

In general, for all the good singing one hears (and there is an abundance of it, in all parts of the United States and Canada), many of the shortcomings in interpretation, of failure to realize all the possibilities of the song and the singers' voices, may be laid to a technique lacking in certain vital essentials.

It is not uncommon to hear a soprano with easily delivered lower and middle tones who has a top that sounds almost like another voice; to hear a tenor with facility in one portion of the voice which is utterly lacking elsewhere; to listen to a mezzo-soprano or a contralto who exaggerates to the extent of pulling the voice out of shape on the lower pitches; and encountering baritones and bassos whose unpleasant upper tones alone keep them from arriving in larger ways.

Go where you will, to any country offering pretentious concert and opera performances, and you will hear much, too much, singing that, technically, is not all it should be. It exists at the New York Metropolitan Opera, and among opera companies active in Chicago, Philadelphia, Boston, San Francisco, Los Angeles, and other United States cities. It is to be heard in London's Covent Garden, within the

walls of Bayreuth's Festspielhaus, at the State theatres of Berlin, Munich and Vienna, and in as marked a degree at Milan's La Scala and in the leading opera houses of Rome, Naples and other of Italy's centers. I have heard far too much technically deficient singing in all those places, and in other places too . . . including the Paris Grand Opéra and the Paris Opéra-Comique.

As for the concert platform, which has none of opera's pomp and glitter nor the friendly mass of orchestral tone to cover individual vocal defects—well, it is the concert or recital, with only a pianoforte furnishing the instrumental background, which reveals the singer in his true vocal estate. Fewer shortcomings may be apparent when the occasion calls for orchestra accompaniment; but it is quite another matter when the demand is for pianoforte alone.

I am in full accord with those who maintain that the interpretive side of song is, or should be, uppermost. Sheer beauty and purity of tone, regardless of how perfect may be its mechanical delivery, can never atone for any superficial treatment of text and music. One may forgive much that may seem technically wanting where the singer touches interpretive heights. Still, I insist that—as with the singer—having to listen to a great violinist or pianist play upon an inferior instrument is almost as insufferable as to hear a strikingly gifted young instrumentalist fail to realize interpretively what he might have realized, had he possessed an adequate technique.

Briefly then, conceding technique to be no more than

an essential part of several means to an artistically desired end, that end in its fullest degree is possible only when the technique is well enough developed to give the artist's mind and emotions free rein. It is especially true of the singer, since a song demands the telling of some story simultaneously with the utterance of music notes. How, one may properly ask, can a singer be expected to do justice to the finer meanings of a poem and impart adequately to each phrase of the music its intended color, if there be technical difficulties to cause him anxiety?

Almost no singer thus handicapped ever can satisfy completely. He is forever obsessed with concern over what may happen on a certain note, or series of notes. Compelled to give his main attention to encompassing an approaching technical obstacle, he must subordinate (for the moment, at least) the interpretive to the mechanical. The exception is to be found only where a great interpretive artist is aided by natural magnificence of voice; and generally during the flush of his career, before improper use of that voice has finally robbed it of an earlier ability to surmount technical shortcomings through sheer strength, and a facility in *manipulating* tones which is the peculiar property of the few.

Thus, it must be evident how imperative it should be to acquire a skill which will enable a singer to sound at will any pitch he desires in a manner that will permit him to obtain what he seeks; with each tone so unconstrained physically as to enable every word to be delivered with its

utmost meaning and color. Apart from the sense of mental security such a skill brings, it is also true that the fullest natural beauty of a singing voice can be attained only when one has mastered, or has closely approached mastering, a technique which yields physical comfort and makes it possible to sound tones that match one another in relative quality throughout the entire compass of the voice.

Having set forth my main reasons for attaching an outstanding importance to a superior vocal technique, it is pertinent to go somewhat into detail concerning the fundamentals upon which such a technique can be reared.

1. To begin at the beginning, the act of singing calls for a certain amount of physical effort of various kinds . . . the precise character and extent depending on each individual. Because each person differs, in given respects, from every other person. Wherefore, every individual, even though resorting to the same processes which constitute relatively easy and approximately correct employment of the singing voice, must adapt those processes to his physical peculiarities; to his psychological make-up.

2. The ideal use of the singing voice prevails when one is able to sing, with varying degrees of power ranging from mezzo-piano to fortissimo, any sequence of pitches that lie within the compass of the voice; on any vowel and consonant or combination of the two; and with every tone (high, medium and low) matching relatively every other tone. In short, when the technical employment of the voice permits the sounding of every pitch without a

marked *shifting* or *re-adjustment* or *manipulation* of the mechanism—to the end that there is no weak spot which must be favored, and with the result that all the tones, whatever their character in power or color, are pure and without noise or a suggestion of breathiness.

3. The act of singing will consist of three things:

- (A) Mental preparation for the phrase or exercise to be sung which, according to the individual, will be either quickly planned or (where a marked technical proficiency has been acquired) virtually automatic.
- (B) Taking into the lungs such amount of air as the individual may require to execute the phrase or exercise.
- (C) Delivery of the first tone and subsequent tones.

The precise mental attitude of the singer towards the making of his tones will vary as widely as individuals vary, one from another. Where one will bring his listening senses uppermost, placing less attention on his physical sensations, another may reverse the procedure.

Where one will mentally *direct* or *project* or *place* or *poise* or *deliver* the tone or give it a certain *position* (the choice of any of these terms is optional, since each has one and the same meaning), another person may gain equally satisfactory results by picturing the tone differently. (The great baritone, Giuseppe Campanari, once told me that he mentally *threw* every tone he made into an

imaginary box, a small box, which was high up and far away from him.) When proficiency in the correct use of the voice becomes pronounced, both the mental attitude and the physical sensations felt will become more or less automatic; and almost completely so when the technique is very highly developed.

My investigations lead me to believe that most of our exceptional singers experience, simultaneously, a dual sense of hearing and physically feeling the tones they sing. Their control of the vocal mechanism may, in certain respects, be somewhat dissimilar even though they attain approximately the same results in purity and an evenly-matched quality of their tones, certainty in projection, and in giving to the listener a feeling that it is all being done with apparent ease. Still, though there be some slightly dissimilar employment of the vocal mechanism, that employment will generally be along strikingly similar lines. For the physical act of singing compels in everyone an employment of tongue, lips, lower jaw and the breathing apparatus (all being a part of the singer's voluntary muscular resources, and which he uses as he wills), and, simultaneously, an independent action on the part of what we term the involuntary muscles (which are located around, or connected directly and indirectly with, the larynx—along with the entire larynx itself).

In other words, there are two separate sets of voice-making muscles: the voluntary, controlled by the will; and the involuntary, which should be allowed to function

without intrusion of any sort on the part of the voluntary muscles.

What matters most, in forming and sustaining tones described on a preceding page as "ideal," is to use the voluntary muscles in a way that prevents their interfering with the harmonious functioning of the involuntary muscles . . . since these later, when they attain full development and coördinate one with another, as Nature intended, will perform their respective tasks perfectly.

4. The taking of air into the lungs, and its control and expenditure, constitute a breathing function over which there is no end of dispute. Passing over for the moment the designations given to methods of breath-taking and control, it is sufficient to say that some singers take breath *high* while others take it *low*.

What is of chief importance is to take and release the flow of breath comfortably—taking care not to fill the lungs too full—and to feed no more breath to the vocal chords than will cause them to vibrate on the pitch desired in such manner as will convert that breath supply into pure tone. Expending too much breath not alone causes a "breathy" or otherwise distorted tone, but generally prevents sustaining lengthy phrases.

Breath taken into the lower portion of the lungs, and controlled by muscles in the vicinity of the waist (front, sides and back and lower ribs) impresses me as the most natural and surest procedure in giving satisfactory results in providing the motive power to singing.

It is my experience, and that of most singers accepted as exponents of exceptional technical control with whom I am in accord on this manner of breathing and breath-control, that the breathing part of singing is largely regulated by the tone itself. This may appear to be putting the cart before the horse, yet it is amazing how a correctly sounded tone seems to take care of itself; how little breath is required for the support of every tone which, to be right, must not be pushed—even on the highest pitches.

5. Posture of the body in singing is of varying importance, depending once again on the individual. We know that some persons can sing excellently made tones either seated or standing; some can even do that while reclining. But the most advantageous position of the body is an erect one, in which there is no stiffness. The vocal apparatus—all of it—seems to work most easily and surely with the head held level (not tilted backwards at an angle to cause a marked elevation of the chin), the shoulders on a line vertical with the hips, the abdomen flattened, the feet slightly apart and either on a line with each other or one foot slightly advanced. The entire attitude should be one of controlled relaxation (neither too relaxed nor verging on tenseness) which resembles the bearing of those boxers who are erect and poised on the balls of their feet and ready to apply, at an instant's notice, all the snap and power occasion may demand.

6. Caruso often told me (during the many talks we had

on *the how* of singing) that the tone should have two points of resistance. "If I try to push this piano," he said (and he immediately illustrated his words by action), "I must place my hands against the piano and have my feet planted firmly on the floor. If I have nothing to push against with my feet how can I expect to move the piano? My hands, thrusting against the piano, represent the tone; my feet, braced against the unyielding floor, represent the column of air. The latter supports the former, and so I feel the tone as something securely fixed, while it vibrates, by a support from below."

That explanation sounded most reasonable. It seems convincingly so now, since my own experiments have enabled me to experience a sensation somewhat similar.

Caruso also explained further with respect to how he conceived, felt and heard the tone, an explanation coinciding, interestingly enough, with statements made to me by other great men and women singers who are considered among the foremost for the approximately perfect use of their voices.

"On all pitches, low and medium and high, I think of the tone and feel it as a definite substance which is compact and flowing. I imagine it as a sort of ball of tone focused at the point where my forehead and nose join—but *behind* the nose, not in it.

"Sensation of the tone, so far as I am concerned," observed Caruso, "is very definite. It is a guide to my belief that it is as right as I can make it; and this feeling of the

tone works in conjunction with my hearing of it, because the sound as I hear it is quite as important and may tell me whether it is what I have attempted to make or is not. While I try never to miss forming and keeping the tone with a point that begins, as I have explained, around the point where my nose and forehead join, I am conscious on certain pitches of an expansion of the sensation. I even experience vibrations in the region of my upper chest when I sing medium-low and low pitches. At the same time," he went on, "I do not change the position of the tone—that is, the way I form it, which is always the same physically and almost the same mentally.

"While I do not consciously alter the throat opening, which should be left free to operate naturally and without pressure, I think that it may tend to open more for my highest pitches; perhaps the soft palate lifts a little, though I never consciously lift it. My whole thought is always directed to making and keeping every tone up and forward and having a point of concentration. From the E-flat above I find this concentration increasing. On the pitches above my F-natural, F-sharp and G I get the vibrations higher and perhaps even a trifle more in the forehead; and on my top B-flat and B-natural and high-C it seems as though the tone was coming straight from my forehead.

"I seem to feel a larger throat-opening on these extreme high pitches; and it as though there was even an enlarging of the space inside the forehead, although I suppose

that doesn't happen. But there is so much of sensation in the region I mention that I am aware of no other part of my vocal mechanism below my upper front teeth. So far as the breath is concerned, I rarely give much thought to it. I take as little as possible, and most of the time unconsciously. I always know there has been breath support when I finish a phrase because of an impulse I feel right here"—and Caruso placed one hand on the point marking the pit of his stomach. "Another thing that helps me," and Caruso wrinkled up his face, "is to lift my upper lip, and cheeks. And I lift my eyebrows too."

Caruso emphasized the importance of "bringing the tone together." By that he meant that it should be consolidated and then solidified. He abhorred a tone lacking a *point* (concentration). I have heard him speak of a tone as "spongy" and "loose" and "porous", meaning one that was spread—either through lack of adequate breath-support or some faulty use of the vocal mechanism in the throat region—and which was therefore a tone lacking focus.

7. The tone, when right, will ensue from a perfect approximation of the vocal cords which are caused to vibrate evenly on each desired pitch by just the proper amount of breath impelled against the cords. The attending requirements are a splendid control of well developed voluntary muscles (chiefly those of the upper and forward part of the pharynx, the upper lip, and cheeks), together with a smooth action of the involuntary muscles

(in the throat and neck region) which, when not interfered with by any undue pressure or constriction put upon them by one or more than one of the voluntarily controlled muscles, will not alone coördinate with one another harmoniously but gain in strength, pliability and endurance in a way that will enable that coördination at length to become extraordinary in results.

When both voluntary and involuntary muscles have finally attained that degree of development and control and operation, the tone, when formed and sustained, will impress the singer as *riding* on the breath (or column of air). It will resemble the up-and-down movement of a rubber-ball that rises and falls on the tip of a stream of water, as that stream is intensified or diminished by the pressure back of it.

8. Most singers unconsciously *pull down* on the tone, and quite often when that is the very thing they seek to avoid. This happens when the position of the tone is not high enough; and it can happen when definite effort is made to project the tone high and keep it high. This pulling down of the tone generally is caused by delivering it straight out, rather than arching it up and over; and is influenced by a constriction of some of the throat muscles, sometimes by a stiff tongue or lower jaw (or by both). A too widely opened mouth can also exert an undesirable effect, because there is a tendency for the tone to be projected and kept low when the lower jaw is dropped or pulled down unduly.

It should be borne constantly in mind that one should do one's singing mainly from the upper teeth up. There is of course the necessary function of taking and expending breath, which calls for action by the lungs and the lower rib and waist-region muscles; and one cannot well avoid using the tongue and lower jaw. Nevertheless, the *heart* of our singing *power-house* is to be found in that portion which constitutes the region of the hard palate and extends forward and upward. The greater part of it can be covered by one hand, if one will insert the under side of the thumb uppermost against the hard palate and extend the first and second fingers up and over the nose to the forehead.

9. My belief is that the proper direction, or movement, of the tone (as pictured in the mind) should be as something arched upward, and forward and over. Some of our greatest singers picture in that way the tones they form and sustain. They also *feel* each tone, and succession of tones, as compact sound that vibrates almost entirely from the upper lip up. They like to feel that the tone is detached from whatever lies below the hard palate (despite their knowledge that the lungs, the diaphragm and lower-rib and waist muscles, the vocal chords, pharynx and other throat muscles, and tongue and lower jaw all play important parts in making and sustaining tone).

11. Until a secure technique such as has been described has been fully acquired the tone will vary—in both its

sensation and sound—to the person who makes the tone. It will *feel* different and *sound* different at the various stages of the technical progress. These differences will be more marked on various pitches sounded; but gradually, as the proficiency increases, the difficult pitches will become less difficult and, finally, smooth out and either disappear entirely or be minimized to an extent that removes them as serious difficulties. When this development has been reached, the tone will take on consolidation and solidification; it will have a *bite* at its first sounding (akin to that of a well made violin tone); and it will seem to move forward and upward and over, very much as though it were being rolled over on a wheel.

The singer will never mistake either the feeling or the sound of his tones, when they are made substantially in the manner I have described. He may be led to believe, as he begins to acquire control of his voice by employing those technical fundamentals I have set forth, that he has mastered more of them than he really has; that his muscles, voluntary and involuntary, are more fully developed and serving him more perfectly than is really the case. He will only become aware of this when he has reached a more advanced stage technically; and if he be keenly self-analytical, and not moved to let well-enough alone, he will realize that, regardless of much he may have accomplished, more still remains to be done. Most development, with discerning and wise persons, generally goes in that way; each progressive step discloses the pre-

ceding capacities to have been overestimated.

It can be absorbingly interesting, this acquiring of a technique which brings forth the best in a singing-voice; to experience the growth in facility and certainty in making and sustaining tones of corresponding excellence from extreme bottom to top of the compass. And when one reaches that fortunate point of being able to command all the individual voice will permit, in purity of tone and its power and coloring and on any word he is called on to pronounce, the personal satisfaction becomes the main reward.

The sensation of feeling the throat to be a sort of open space, and of the tone as something that is issuing forth as though pouring from an imaginary tube very much like water flowing freely from a faucet, is one of indescribable delight. Equally so is the feeling that the tone is finding its way to the proper resonating spaces, and being deflected to a *point* that brings the focus at that high and forward space which gives the singer a sense of absolute security.

It is when this degree of voice development and control has been attained that the tones appear to the singer to be an unrestrained cascade of musical sounds. And it is then, too, that the vocal endurance will become such as to make relatively easy the singing of a vocally taxing piece of music.

It should not be assumed that this technical proficiency will yield any more in quality, compass, and power than

the inherent possibilities of an individual voice permit. Every voice is susceptible to a definite development, in each of these elements, and no more. While the acquiring of perfect form by an athlete endowed with moderate high-jumping ability may aid him in increasing the height of his leap several inches above the best he may have been able to do before he gained that perfect form, if under most propitious conditions his natural limit be five feet, eight inches, he cannot, in the nature of things, expect the acquisition of a perfect high-jumping form to put him among these whose endowments enable them to jump six feet and more.

P R A C T I C A L H I N T S

5.

In the course of my varied experiences in what may be termed "the music game" I have made a number of discoveries. One of them is that both the rank and file of the world's singing contingent (professional and amateur alike) can be divided into three general classifications:

1. Those who use their voices moderately well, if not with a degree of perfection which causes them to be regarded as having a markedly superior technique; men and women who have gained recognition ranging from the fair to the very highest. They number those who are content, for one reason or another, to let well enough alone; others who are skeptical of finding a different way for materially improving their technique; and those who, while conceding they have technical shortcomings, cannot spare from their professional activities the continuous time which is almost always necessary to correct those shortcomings.

2. Those who sing extremely well, yet, aware of their technical deficiencies, are ever ready and willing to adopt whatever measures they believe will aid in technical improvement.

3. Those whose complacency prevents a full appreciation of their technical faults; yet numbering among them

some who will gravitate from one instructor to another, enthusing over each newly-found one before having worked long enough to have formed a conclusive opinion.

I know of few decisions more difficult to reach with the consciousness of having decided aright than choosing a teacher of singing technique. Perplexing as it can be for the beginner, it is often increasingly so for whoever has studied with several persons without having gained what was sought.

So far as I am aware, there is no rule for safe guidance in this matter beyond that of trial and error. You select an instructor, place confidence in his qualifications to give you a leg up, and start for the goal. If you submit wholly to doing, or trying to do, all he asks, and if you have the natural singing resources with which you and he can work profitably, then you find one day that he has what you seek, or that he seemingly hasn't.

There are plenty of instances where pupil and teacher—though each may have the resources to competently perform his respective task—do not go well together. It is when such a situation exists that each may criticise the other undeservedly, when in point of strict fact neither is altogether at fault. It may be nothing other than two temperaments unsuited to each other; a lack of being congenial, wherein teacher and pupil fail to establish that harmonious relationship essential to the pupil's progress and to the teacher's performing satisfactorily his task. The fact that the pupil goes his way, dissatisfied, does not mean

that the teacher may not be successful with others; nor that the pupil is lacking in an ability to acquire elsewhere a correct use of his voice.

This brings us to the matter of the various procedures (some term them "methods") advocated by different teachers. That there are many such is a widely known fact. It is also well known that where a number of these procedures yield results generally satisfying to many singers who have used them, these self-same ways of striving for technical proficiency have proved dismal failures with others.

Several highly pertinent questions are natural in the light of all this. "Why," one may inquire, "isn't it possible for a considerable number of successful teachers of singing technique to form themselves into a group; agree upon certain basic principles as constituting the foundation for what they consider a correct technique, and then adopt for general use by those members a procedure calculated as the one most likely to enable the majority pupils to acquire 'the perfect' technique?"

The answer to that is that such a course would bring forth violently conflicting opinions as to the best "how" of teaching correct singing technique. Getting any successful teacher to yield on certain portions of his own "how", and agree to the substituting of another's ways of teaching, would be regarded as an admission of weakness—if not a confession of teaching inferiority.

Two other pertinent questions are: "What is at the bot-

tom of the diverse opinions concerning the fundamentals of a correct singing technique? And how can it be possible to acquire such a technique, through different ways of voice development?"

The chief reasons for the variance of teachers' opinions about voices, and how they should be trained to most satisfactory ends, are due (a) to the widespread differences in hearing and analytical ability, (b) to the varying degrees of existing teaching skill and (c) to the elusiveness of all that touches upon the singing-act itself—since, it is something which cannot be spread out to see and touch.

Acquiring what listeners competent to express expert opinion term "a correct singing technique", via different ways of training the voice, is no less possible than to develop to an equal extent the biceps of several persons through different sets of exercises.

Broad-minded teachers of singing, who specialize in technique, are ever ready to exchange views with one another on points they consider vital. Much of this is done by members of associations of teachers of singing; but so far as I am aware nothing of a concrete nature ever has been done to formulate and have accepted a given way of training singing voices (a standardization formula).

Perhaps one day some person having exceptional qualifications in keenness of tone perception, who can accurately analyze the pros and cons of a voice, and suggest readily grasped measures which have proved almost unfailingly to serve when applied expertly, may step forth

so prominently as to be accorded top ranking in the world of voice technique. If such good fortune ever should come about the matter of training voices might then become so definite, possibly so relatively simple, even, that what now is the unusual in acquiring a first-rate technique would be a commonplace circumstance.

Until such a person appears, and is acclaimed, we must proceed in ways deemed by each individual as best suited to his own judgment and preferences. That some teachers are markedly superior to others is, as I have pointed out, indisputable. That some are considered better than they really are, through an estimate erroneously based on their having, or having had, as pupils some singers occupying high places, also is sometimes the case. The truth is that some singers thrive despite, rather than because of, what their teachers have to offer. I know of teaching reputations unwarrantedly gained where pupils, who were well established professionals, sang no better technically (if as well) after working with those teachers than they sang before. In a few instances these professionals were so generously endowed with voice, and all else that makes for success, that nothing could have prevented their singing well—unless somebody had choked them.

It is the mean average of a teacher's accomplishments with his pupils that counts; not the isolated instances. It should also be borne in mind that unusual things cannot be done with mediocre pupils. Gaining prestige as a teacher of outstanding ability demands better-than-aver-

age material to work with. We should of course look for the exceptional teacher in those places from which exceptional results generally emerge. Yet this should not be taken to mean that they are not to be found, too, in other places. Nor that there are no truly superior teachers we may never have heard about, since the contrary must be true.

Another thing: One need not necessarily be able to sing in order to teach acceptably, or far better than acceptably, because some of our most popular teachers do not sing. On the other hand, some admirable singers are no great shakes as teachers. There are advantages where, in addition to having all the requisites essential to providing superior instruction, a teacher can also sing. But he should be able to deliver correctly made tones, as well as tones which are not correct; otherwise whatever vocally-made illustrations he undertakes can only mislead.

As I have previously observed, the safest test to determine teaching fitness lies with trial and error. The pupil himself must be the first judge—even where he may wish to have what he regards the competent judgment of others. Such outside opinion, however, should not only be expert but none too hastily sought. Sufficient time to allow for progress, or a failure to make progress, is necessary—if that opinion is to be worth anything. Moreover, to permit any lack of confidence in a teacher to arise before he has had every opportunity to demonstrate the extent of his capacities can be as damaging to the pupil's

own chances for succeeding as it is unfair to the teacher.

So—it is often the pupil who is at fault. And it may be due to causes other than an ability to grasp and apply the measures offered which have been proved highly efficacious. This may be due to very inferior or defective vocal resources; to a limited vocal comprehension; to impatience, in a desire to go too quickly; to being a poor student; to a lackadaisical disposition; or to having some obstruction or obstructions in the nose or throat which render progress in voice technique impossible without their removal. There are occasions, too, when the persistence of the pupil wilts . . . and he either gives up utterly or else decides to try a change of teachers, when he has nearly reached the point he has been striving to reach.

Learning how to use the singing voice correctly presupposes some degree of voice, a measure of vocal responsiveness and aptitude, a fair musicality, general good health and no physical impediments of nose and throat, a moderately good hearing sense, patience, submissiveness, and persistence. Lacking any one of these qualities may keep the goal from one's reach. Lacking any two makes its attainment impossible.

I know of pupils who expect quick results, even when told beforehand that to acquire a fine technique takes considerable time. I know of others who, when corrected, lose their tempers, and sulk, because of their unwillingness to accept and turn to account what is only helpfully meant criticism. And I also know of others who work

with two instructors at the same time, in the misguided hope that each has something not possessed by the other—a practice as foolish as it is disloyal.

What always has puzzled me is why a person can be so stupid as to put himself under another's guidance, and thereafter resent what he is presumably paying money to have told him. I can appreciate that a sensitive nature rarely takes kindly to criticism; and I sympathize with anyone who has to contend with angrily or sarcastically voiced comment, when the pupil is obviously doing his best. But if it is one's misfortune to come under the tutelage of a coarse or short-tempered instructor, the sole reason for remaining is a conviction that benefits are accruing from the instruction.

One of the gravest errors of most who are striving for a sound singing technique is their impatience to sing songs before they are able to do so with some measure of technical success. There should be no satisfaction (certainly there is no aid to technical progress) in trying to sing songs when there is a manifest inability to use the voice in a manner corresponding with its use in vocal exercises. On the contrary, such attempts (either during the formative stages of one's technical development, or where an experienced singer is seeking to correct technical shortcomings) should be confined to using a song to test the degree of one's growth in the ability to apply, to the singing of a song, what is being done in one's exercises.

During the thirty years devoted to pursuing my "sing-

ing and singers" hobby it has been my privilege to hear nearly every distinguished artist who has come before the public. I have also listened, in my professional capacity as a reviewer, to many hundreds of others whose rating (figuring 100 percent. as perfect) ranged from zero to something like seventy-five. Apart from discussions on singing technique, and ways for acquiring it, with most of the singing celebrities of the past thirty years I have sat through lessons given by many teachers to various of their pupils, and listened to their views on technical fundamentals and their ways of training different voices.

The sum total of what I gathered from all those of the teaching craft with whom I came in contact was as valuable as it has been enlightening. The conclusion I long since reached is that all were aiming for virtually the same thing, and proceeding (despite differences in their respective viewpoints as to the precise ways of going) in the same general direction.

Where one would stress a given manner of taking and controlling the expenditure of breath as the cornerstone of correct singing, another placed most of his eggs in the "tone placement" basket. Still another, thrusting aside the "placing" or conscious "directing" of tone as all wrong, would hail pure vowel formation as the key to correct singing. And yet—without a dissenting voice—the opinions of all these teachers coincide on the elements of well made singing tones, those elements, in the aggregate, being what I have stressed on preceding pages.

So, it would appear, teaching others the "how" of correct singing, as exemplified by the admitted leaders of this generation of songs, rests jointly with the teacher's ability to accurately analyze a pupil's needs and then, as guide and counselor, to proceed in ways that lead to supplying those needs.

You will hear most teachers exclaim that no two pupils can be treated alike; that each has peculiarities calling for individual treatment. Nevertheless, I have yet to meet a teacher with whose methods I have become familiar who did not use his own pet set of exercises with each of his pupils. Such a thing as working up something "special" to fit a difficult case is a process unknown to me.

A first safe procedure for sounding a singing tone, as I regard it, is to stand with a body-posture described in a previous chapter; take a reasonable quantity of air into the lower and middle portion of the lungs, and then, while seeking to experience a feeling of freedom in the throat and neck region, to sound a given pitch.

I prefer not to indicate a definite "exercise" (that is, the vowel to be used, and whether it be sustaining a single pitch for several beats or a sequence of pitches). But whatever it might be, my observations will cover any exercise, and fit equally well any type of song.

I have already stated that most persons exercise, in the act of singing, a dual sense of simultaneously "hearing" and "feeling" the tone; and that almost all persons also form a mental picture of the tone—its movement or direc-

tion, its point of focus. This latter course—picturing and hearing and feeling the tone—is what I advocate, because each sensation is definite; and combining them brings into action three of man's five senses.

As the tone is imagined, the actual sounding can be aided by raising the upper lip so that the upper teeth show and at the same time raising the cheeks, and even the eyebrows. One need not fear developing permanent facial exaggerations. They are never present when the technique is fully developed. One should also think “up, up and over”, and visualize the tone as turning on a wheel—a very tiny wheel, about the size of a silver dollar—which is revolving away from the singer in a space situated at the point just above where the upper part of the nose joins the forehead. This mental picture will be found to be an invaluable aid in achieving the kind of tone which thrills; a tone of mellow warmth in the middle and lower pitches, and of colorful brilliancy on top. The point of origination, as well as the point of concentration, will be “felt” by the singer as seeming to take place in this small space I mention—where nose and forehead join (although the tone of course originates at the vocal chords).

I am aware that many singers with an excellent technique “feel” the tone as seeming to originate and focus just back of the upper front teeth. Caruso viewed the matter differently; and I agree with him. There can be no questioning that pharynx resonance figures importantly in a tone that is “felt” as a nicely arched or “turned” tone

in that small space just above the extreme upper part of the nose. And that the resonating spaces of the antrum, (on both sides of the nose, right up to and directly under the eyes) also figure importantly in a properly formed singing tone. Caruso always liked to feel the tone high, (at the point I have mentioned, which is well above the upper front teeth). That, at any rate, was his sensation; and he felt it change only very slightly regardless of pitch—whether high, middle, or low.

I emphasize this matter of experiencing the sensation of the tone as being felt at that small point just above the nose and forehead junction because feeling it there (when all else, vocally, is right) imparts an indescribable sense of tonal security. Some persons may feel this sensation area as more extensive, and tending somewhat downwards—which is quite all right, if that imparts security and comfort. It is the approximation of the sensation area that matters. There will be vibrations that also are felt simultaneously elsewhere: in the chest region, when low pitches are sounded; and high in the forehead, for the extremely high pitches. Yet never will that controlling focal-point be felt by the singer (in forming a “perfect” tone) as being relinquished in the tiniest degree. It will be the governor of the tone; the receiving station of all the vibrations which will converge from their various resonating spaces to that one point which, controlled by the singer, enables him to command its intensity, amplification, and color in the precise degree desired.

What happens when a tone is formed with the voluntary and the involuntary muscles working in perfect harmony (no pushing or interferences in the throat region, and no forcing of the breath) is an open throat, and the tone formed as Nature intended. Once this technique is mastered the lips give little evidence of what is happening inside the mouth; how all the tone-forming muscles are functioning. The singer really does it all from within; for when such a technique has been acquired he is able to perform vocal feats with an almost impassive countenance.

When all the muscles are well developed, and are co-ordinating smoothly with one another, the tone will appear to find its way to that nose-and-forehead spot with almost no guidance on the singer's part. He will find himself able to do all with the tone he desires to do—to obtain from the tone all it is able to yield.

There will be no "weak" spot in the voice—low, medium, or high. That dread portion of a singer's voice which is the "bridge" between the upper middle pitches and the lowest of the higher ones (what the French refer to as "the passage") will be a solid sequence of pitches that hold no terrors for the singer.

The singer who uses his voice in the manner I advocate will not think of "registers". He will not attempt to "cover" or "close" his tones on the few pitches that constitute this bridge between upper middle and lowest higher ones (and it pertains to women singers as well as to men),

because there will be no need for “covering” or “closing” on those pitches. I always feel a deep sympathy for singers who strive to bring those tones under control by use of throat muscles, because it is a physical impossibility to do other than choke the tone and put a strain on the throat. Such a technique as I advocate enables its possessor to sing all tones with the arch every properly made tone should have—with every degree of power and on all pitches, low, middle, and high. Such tones are arched, or turned, inside (not outside) the mouth and in the upper nose and forehead region. The singer experiences a “drawing together” of the tone at that point. He feels a very definite point of resistance at that one spot. The tone feels to the singer as being well consolidated and solidified; of having “movement”, and being turned away from him. Such a tone *never* is “in” the nose, in the tiniest degree; it is *always above* the nose . . . even though “nasal resonance”, as some people term it, is present. For there is a vast difference between nasal resonance (which is desirable) and a nasal quality of tone (which is undesirable to have to hear).

I visualize a properly formed and projected tone as moving “up,” (to a point just behind the upper part of the nose), “over” (curving to that spot just above where nose and forehead join), and “down”, which completes the arch. But it must be an arch that is tipping constantly forward—never one that drops back. That is: the heel of the arch must be elevated as much as possible.

All this may sound strange to some who are experiencing technical difficulties. It may impress some who sing quite well, if not with a first-rate technique, as strange. It is only when one has acquired a use of the voice to ends such as I advocate that it all becomes as clear as a piece of crystal. It is then, and then only, that one appreciates fully that every well made tone has an arch; that it is up and forward and is turning away from the singer; and that the arch is always tilting forward.

It is then, too, that one realizes how essential it is to maintain this forward-tilting arch when singing the pitches of the middle voice, and those of the lower voice. That it spells an instantaneous change of voice quality to allow the "heel" of the arch to drop; and usually indicates that the tone has been permitted to get outside the mouth. Finally—that maintaining this forward-tilting of the arch is imperative in descending from higher pitches to lower ones . . . if there is to be a preservation of a relative matching of the tones in quality.

I can imagine innumerable questionings, a detailed explanation touching the "how" of acquiring such command of singing tones, and how long the approximate time required to reach that desired state.

The procedure, as I have previously stated, is definite and relatively simple. But it calls for personal supervision by one who hears with exceptional keenness; who has a special flair for analyzing singing voices; and a special teaching skill. As for the matter of time: it can be

anything from two or three years to four to six. Some singer, with only a few technical faults, might acquire a fully first-rate technique in less than the shortest time I have mentioned. Several factors are involved, which renders impossible any attempt to specify time.

But, to continue—

Different singers form different mental images as they sing. Some maintain that they see nothing with their minds' eyes . . . though I wonder if this really is so. Because every effort, mental or physical, is invariably preceded by a command of the will. Wherefore, the probabilities are that with everyone there is some manner of mental conception concerning tone.

Important though this is, the matter of tone-sensation is of prime importance: the feeling the singer should have, as I have described it (along with some sort of mental conception of the tone), at the point I have described. A simultaneous hearing of the tone also is highly important. Yet, important as "hearing" is, I am not in accord with those who seek to develop technique primarily through the hearing sense. I prefer sensation and hearing to go hand in hand with mental conception of tone.

I therefore repeat: the sensation of acquiring a first-rate technique is, for me, the first and foremost essential. What one hears comes next—a very close next. And what that is will depend entirely on one's individual voice. If it chances to be naturally "free" the sound may be quite agreeable. But if there is a muscular constriction where

none should be, or an undue looseness, the sound can be anything from "throaty" and "pinched", "hollow" and "sepulchral", to a "spread" and "breathy" tone. If the lower jaw be dropped too far, so that a markedly large mouth-opening ensues, the tone likewise may be adversely affected. If the sound is nasal then one may be sure that it is *in* the nose, not behind and above it; and there will be little, if any, mellowness and "movement" such as is always present in a fine singing tone.

I doubt if the average person will be able, at the outset, to hear in his voice more than a fraction of what a discerning instructor will hear. However, constant and painstaking efforts, when a certain progress has been made, will enhance this ability to hear one's own tones to a degree that will enable him to determine whether the tones are what he is striving for; what the imperfections when they are not.

The more completely one can dismiss from the mind all that is happening physically in the throat region during the singing act—everything below the spot where soft palate and hard palate join, right on down to the base of the neck at its front—the better for the ultimate freedom and quality of the tone.

The purpose, as may be gathered, is to picture and feel and hear the tone as definitely as may be possible to the individual; and to bring about a nice balance of these senses at the beginning of the singing act and throughout its duration. We know, of course, that tone is nothing

more tangible than a series of sound waves. Yet the more one can imagine it as something definite in a physical sense, so that it seems to the singer to be a substance he actually feels (he certainly feels vibrations from every tone he makes); and the clearer his mental picture of the direction and the focusing of the tone—well, the more definite will the singing act become, and the greater the singer's certainty to sound and sustain tones that give as much satisfaction to himself as they afford pleasure to his listeners.

The reader will no doubt be moved, at this point, to inquire about the breath. Why, since it furnishes the motive power to singing and must therefore be called into play before any sound is made, the taking of breath and the control of its expenditure appears to have been subordinated thus far in this chapter to the emphasis put upon the picturing of tone by the singer, the physical sensations he experiences from its vibrations, and the tone as it sounds to him.

I have touched lightly on the breathing portion of the singing act for reasons given earlier in this book. Important though it is, I am almost tempted to state that it is even more dependent upon correctly made tones for its regulation and easy functioning than tone is, for its very being, upon breath. As I have remarked before, when the tone is right the breath is more than likely to be right. That is to say, its expenditure is. I have found, in my investigations, that most singers with a superior tech-

nique take breath into the lower and middle portions of the lungs and expend it by a use of the diaphragm and the muscles of the waist, back, and lowest ribs. Taking breath in that manner, and then holding it, and thereafter releasing it little by little are such physically simple matters that (when illustrated) they can be grasped, almost immediately—though learning to do so call for time and practise.

Supplying breath to the vocal chords and transforming breath into tone is a combined physical act, in which the breath-control muscles used (diaphragm and waist and lowest rib muscles, for low breathing; upper chest muscles, for higher breathing) coöperate with the vocal chords. The breath-control muscles provide the impulse necessary to send breath from the lungs, in whatever quantity the singer wills, to the vocal chords. These muscles also act in retarding the flow of breath, or in checking it entirely, so that the lungs momentarily cease actively to function.

What happens breath-wise, however, when a tone is sounded, *depends entirely upon the character of the tone* . . . and in a way many persons do not quite understand.

For the “position” of the tone determines, to an extent not generally appreciated, the quantity of breath required to sound and to sustain that tone. If it be high, well concentrated, and projected as the technically exceptional singers form and project tone, then the amount of breath demanded by the vocal chords to transform it into the

pitch and power and color desired will be no more than just enough to transform nearly every particle of that breath into pure tone.

And right here is where the tone, via the agency of the vocal chords, serves to make the breath part of singing dependent upon tone—regardless of whether it be well or poorly made. Because a tone which is low in position will demand more breath than one which is high. When a tone is “forced” it not only calls for an extra supply of breath, but the forcing process disturbs the proper functioning of the vocal chords—hence, among other ills, comes an escapement of breath or air, which gives an impure sound in which “breathiness” or “noise,” or both will occur.

Contrary-wise: where there is an inadequate breath-supply (usually present in “lazy” singing, or when a *mezza-voce* is faultily sounded by dropping the position of the tone, giving it little arch) the vocal chords are denied a motive-power such as is imperative to enable them to function properly.

We thus become aware of how importantly tone figures as a sort of regulator or governor in the expenditure of breath; and why I insist that when the tone is right the breath expenditure cannot be other than right. For in this most desirable circumstance (the crowning technical moment in superior singing) there ensues a nice coördination of the entire voice-making resources; each one performing its own independent task, without causing or sus-

taining interference of any kind to or from any of the other voice-making resources. I can think of no more appropriate illustration for describing the nice adjustment and perfect all-around muscular balance which prevails during this ultimate moment in the singing-act than to compare it with the all-round muscular coördination and balance of the star pitcher at the moment the base-ball is projected from his fingers towards the batter. For in a correct forming and project of singing-tone there will always be found a relatively similar rhythm and perfect "timing" which is present in the rhythm and "timing" of the base-ball pitcher's delivery.

Some of our most technically proficient singers agree that a combination of "lift" and "throw" of the tone attends a complete command of the tone, with the "throw" predominating. This "lift" (which is accompanied by a raising of the soft palate) is safer, as well as easier, during the earlier stages of one's technical development. It is only when the voluntary and the involuntary muscles, both from the larynx on upwards, have become fully developed that their control and perfect functioning enables the singer to form and project (or throw) the tone in the precise degree of power and color he wills.

When this facility has finally been acquired the singer's will becomes the dominant factor in tone-making. He is conscious only in a secondary degree of what is taking place in that region from the hard palate on down to the larynx itself: of the alteration of the space-size and form

of the pharynx. For, as I have already stated, much can and does happen inside the mouth which is not apparent in any movement of the lips. Once a full relaxation of lower jaw and tongue is gained, and when one has become expert in pronouncing words *inside* the mouth, rather than outside, the benefits to tone forming and projection can amaze.

One may inquire how it is possible to form vowels and sound consonants without a considerable moving of the lips and dropping of the lower jaw; how each word can be enunciated clearly, with the tongue moving freely, so that the singer feels each word as though it were confined in a small space immediately surrounding the upper front teeth.

My answer is that it is simpler than it may appear. And one need not have the skill of a ventriloquist, to be able to speak words on tones—with much less movement of lips and lower jaw than most singers use. I do not mean to imply that the mouth should be static; on the contrary. What I do mean is that most singers sing “mouthily.” They are prone to drop the lower jaw (it usually is a stiff pulling down, rather than a relaxed dropping) more than is good for the tone. When this occurs it too often happens that the tone is pulled down, instead of being arched up and over . . . despite endeavors to project the tone high. A further advantage to the tone ensues when the mouth is not opened too wide, since a reduction of the mouth-resonating space can only

tend to impair the tone. It is, moreover, an aid to arching the tone, to keep the mouth-opening as small as is comfortably possible.

I agree that quite a few excellent singers open their mouths very generously, especially when delivering high tones. There can be no disputing the natural tendency to a wider opening of the mouth on extremely high pitches. But I am striving to emphasize the importance to the ease, quality, resonance, and certainty in a correct forming and projection of tone with a mouth-opening as small as can be made comfortable. There are few singers who resort to a wide-mouth opening who do not project the tone "straight out," on low pitches as well as high. In these instances I have observed that their tones, almost without exception, tend to pull downwards rather than to arch upwards, with the "heel" of the arch dropped below a point which (mentally, at least) keeps it level with the toe.

We know that poorly made tones reflect some resonance from the upper spaces; even the "white" and "mouthy" ones. It is only after the singer becomes technically proficient in a high degree that he may resort to a wide mouth-opening, for coloring his tones and dynamic shadings, without serious impairment to the rightly arched, or "turned," tone. Having such a mastery of his vocal mechanism, every kind of tone—high as well as low, forte or piano—can be sounded to the limit of its possibilities. It is then, and then only, that its possessor may, without

injury to the tone, take seeming technical liberties such as: elevating the chin, opening wide the mouth, and even applying a degree of muscular pressure at point of the throat and neck which would be vocally fatal at any less masterful stage. In that connection I am reminded of what a leading teacher of piano-playing said to a piano-pupil when the latter, commenting on the teacher's insistence that octaves be played in a certain way.

"But," interposed the pupil, "Josef Hofmann doesn't play them that way." To which the teacher replied, testily, "Josef Hofmann can play octaves standing on his head."

I do not deem it advisable to detail the measures I advocate for training a singing voice. Definite though the procedure is, its application to every individual case calls for personal supervision by one who is in all respects competent to do the supervising.

Neither do I mean to intimate that this procedure is the only procedure which can enable one having sufficient natural resources to acquire a technical proficiency of the kind possessed by Caruso, and by that select group of artists who are held up as examples of producing singing tones that are all one can ask.

What I do maintain is that what I have touched upon represents the substance of a procedure which is as positive in results as it is definite in enabling any intelligent pupil to comprehend, and ultimately to utilize with a success limited alone by his natural resources, his diligence,

and his persistence.

It is only when this advanced stage of technical proficiency is reached that one is able to fully appreciate its value. If seeing is believing, equally so is hearing—along with the capacity to achieve consistently such a command of the singing voice as makes it obedient to the will. I refer to a command which is instantly recognized by discriminating listeners as yielding tones that are all that appears possible in freedom, seeming ease in their making, and all-round excellence.

Such technically made tones should not be confused with those of singers whose popularity is gained through other means—and in spite of technical shortcomings which are apparent to the expert. For there are a considerable number of this class of singers whose public acceptance is in excess of their deserts.

I remember well Caruso's observations about his vocal treatment of the different opera rôles he sang, of different pieces of music. "I keep my voices in a sort of cabinet; each type of voice in a different drawer. When I am to sing Rhadames, in 'Aïda,' I take out of one drawer my Rhadames voice. It is heavy and dramatic in fibre. For Nemorino, in 'L'Elisir d'Amore,' I turn to another drawer in that cabinet, for a lighter quality of voice. And during the day when I have a performance I try to keep in the mood of the character I am to sing that evening, so that my voice as well as my thoughts will be in keeping with what I am to do on the stage.

“An artist does not sing Vasco di Gama’s music in ‘L’Africana’ with the same weight of tone he uses for that of Lionel in ‘Marta!’ ” continued Caruso. “He approaches a song that is not operatic with consideration of the style demanded; and he suits his tones to fit. To adopt one weight and general color of voice for every piece of music is to be mechanical, inartistic, and vocally limited.”

Most of our foremost singers recognize these facts; and a few of them, possessed of a first-rate technique, charm almost as much in the adequate employment of their voices as they do in the interpretive treatment of the music sung. Others, less fortunate technically, afford satisfaction to the discerning listener in only a limited degree. Vocally uneven, they are alternately acceptable and unacceptable. A well turned phrase will be followed by one or more that disclose tonal deficiencies which are invariably traceable to an imperfect technique.

The fault, specifically, lies with the forming and projection of a tone (whether high, middle or low; fortissimo, forte, or mezza-voce) which is not arched or turned. It is either delivered straight out; or pulled down; or, if projected high, is what I classify as a “straight” tone—without an arch.

One will hear such a singer even with an exceptional natural voice, emitting a phrase of moderate power in which the tone will be of a markedly different quality than that present in a full-voiced phrase. If the pitch or

pitches be high, the quality will often be thin or breathy or nasal . . . due solely, I would emphasize, to an altering of the technique; to a manipulation of the vocal apparatus practiced by that particular singer. I concede that it often serves; that the public generally may be satisfied. Yet that does not justify the procedure; nor does it make the singer, regardless of his popularity, other than technically imperfect . . . for his tones are far—very far—from the real thing.

How different to the sense of enjoyment—even to the lay listener—is the singer whose tones are relatively the same in quality throughout the entire compass of the voice—high, middle, and low; whose softly sung phrases have the same quality as the most powerful ones. A full-voiced tone that is diminished to a mere thread without any altering of its position imparts a pleasurable thrill to the hearer—something utterly impossible where the tone is allowed to drop (too often from a fairly forward position to one that is spread, and suggestive of breathiness . . . when it is not pinched in the nose).

So—one must not alone keep the tone high, but see to that it is well arched, or turned, no matter what the pitch, or how light the weight of the tone employed. For to sing moderately high pitches with a light tone which has no arch is to sing without color. Such a tone is “flat” in quality, even though it may be perfectly in pitch. And it is still less pardonable where one sings arched tones full-voiced and yet fails to do so with the half-voice.

6.

One of the most unpopular vocal imperfections in a singing voice is a displeasing vibrato. Even the listener who lacks a discriminating hearing sense will remark in such an instance that the voice "shakes" or "wavers." Experts will observe that the singer has a vibrato, or a tremolo, the meaning being that the former is a series of impulses so slow as to offend or that the latter is a series of impulses too rapid to produce a pleasing effect.

Now the truth of the matter is that the chief difference between a vibrato and a tremolo lies in the increased rapidity of the latter over the former in periodic pulsations in pitch, intensity and timbre of the tone. The tremolo resembles a rapid fluttering of the tone. Almost all listeners appear to feel that the singer whose tones are thus affected seems nervous, even when the cause may be due to reasons other than the singer's experiencing some degree of apprehension. On the other hand, a "bad vibrato," in which the periodic pulsations are very slow, is generally looked upon as a vocal defect—either natural or acquired.

Dr. Seashore, in his "The Psychology of the Vibrato in Voice and Instrument," defines a good vibrato as "a pul-

sation of pitch, usually accompanied with synchronous pulsation of loudness and timbre, of such extent and rate as to give a pleasing flexibility, tenderness and richness to the tone."

Scientific experiments made by Dr. Seashore, and other experts in their laboratory work in which instruments have recorded, measured and interpreted sound waves of singing voices and different music instruments, disclose the four physical characteristics of tones to be: pitch, loudness, timbre, and time. In their various combinations and complex forms they provide harmony, melody, rhythm, tone quality and tempo.

It is not the intention here to enter into either an exhaustive or unduly scientific consideration of the vibrato. What does seem pertinent is to make clear certain phases of its character, and the nature of the width of the vibrato wave in connection with its effect upon pitch, intensity (loudness) and timbre. In other words, to consider how an unduly slow or unduly rapid vibrato wave will make a tone sound as something not wholly agreeable. It would appear also in order to discuss some of the causes of the objectionable types of vibrato—the unduly fast and the unduly slow—and measures possible to apply which will completely correct or minimize them.

The "bad vibrato," as a spoiler of what otherwise would be accepted as a fine vocal tone, ranks in insidiousness with faulty intonation; and since a promising career can be checked as utterly by one as by the other, a discussion

of the causes and removal possibilities of each demands attention. Although the amateur has less at stake, when one or the other of these defects is present in his singing, it is important that he should know about them—since no person listens to wobbly or off-pitch tones without experiencing a desire to either depart the place or throw something at the (frequently unaware) offender.

It is questionable if the majority who sing with a “bad vibrato” are able to tell how it came about. But sooner or later it is usually discovered that the tone has what most persons choose to term a “tremolo,” or else a slow up-and-down wave which not infrequently appears to be sounding two different pitches instead of one. Which of the two is the lesser evil I am not prepared to say. What is indisputable, however, is this: If eradication or a decided diminishing of the fault is not brought about, then the individual having that fault should not ask others to listen to him sing.

The main causes responsible for an excessively slow or fast vibrato are:

- (A) A low position or placement of the tone.
- (B) Forcing the tone through the use of too much breath.
- (C) A stiffness at the base of the tongue; a stiff jaw; a jaw held tight at the back, yet dropped so that when the tone is sounded the jaw trembles.

In most cases the trouble lies with the offender's having all three of the above-mentioned faults; though it

must not be assumed that the presence of one, two, or all of them, presupposes a wobble—slow or fast. What I would emphasize is that I do not recall having heard any singer with an excellent tone-position who displayed a “bad vibrato”; and not alone because of a superior technique in this respect but for the reason that wherever it prevails there is usually a sparing use of breath—in short, although adequate support for every tone is always forthcoming, there is no driving of the tone. Contrarily, I might mention singers occupying eminent places in their fields who project their tones faultily and force them, yet who are not afflicted with an habitual vibrato which is excessively fast or slow. What does happen, sometimes, is to hear a singer not given customarily to delivering unsteady tones who will cause surprise by a lapse. This may be attributable to indisposition of one sort or another; to the extreme vocal difficulty of some note or phrase; or even to a moment of apprehensiveness or confusion.

A case typical of a fast “bad vibrato,” which came under my observation recently (and is now well on the road to being remedied), was found on analysis to have been due to all of the unfortunate habits just mentioned. The tone position was low; the tongue at the base stiff, the back part of the jaw as well. Yet the chin, when a tone was sung, under the too-vigorous supply of breath used, shook like the proverbial leaf in a gust of wind. The voice, despite its constriction, was of a naturally beau-

tiful quality; the musical intelligence of its possessor exceptional; the personality striking; the emotional resources abundant. Here was a prospect for an outstanding career who seemingly had everything . . . save being able to get the most possible from these rare gifts.

Months of endeavor, under several different teachers, failed to give any helpful results until the singer finally found an instructor who not only correctly diagnosed the various roots of the trouble but had the skill to apply the corrective measures. The instructor also understood human nature, for this singer had reached a state of mind which called for the utmost tact before a manifest improvement ensued.

Numerous "remedies" had previously been tried by other teachers on this singer, without the slightest success. One concentrated his entire efforts on breath. Another, thinking along different lines (using a hum as the chief means) got nowhere at all. The singer was even urged to use a tight belt, to provide "something to push against," along with the exercises recommended as "certain" to fix matters. All the while this highly intelligent person was in a whirl of uncertainty over the affliction, yet conscious that the tone needed raising, the tongue and jaw released from all tension, and the habit discarded of overloading the lungs with air and of forcing the tone. Acquiring a control of the vocal apparatus approximating that I advocate brought about a correction of the affliction; and this singer is now climbing steadily the ladder of success.

I know of a considerable number of "bad vibrato" cases which were approached by persons undertaking to rid them of that fault by the application of "special" measures; but so far as I am aware nothing ever came out of any of those "cures." One almost unfailing procedure to eradicate, or minimize, a "bad vibrato" is to persist until one becomes able to project every tone high, forward and over—with tongue and jaw properly relaxed—and to take and expend breath in the manner I have previously described.

For the benefit of those who care to go further into the matter of the vibrato, I shall quote and make paraphrases from Dr. Seashore's admirable "Psychology of the Vibrato in Voice and Instrument"—a courtesy extended me by Dr. Seashore and for which I wish to make full acknowledgement.

As most of us know, everything in music is transmitted through the medium of physical sound waves. What we hear, according to the keenness of our respective hearing sense, is by no means what is actually sounded. Scientific instruments prove that everyone underestimates (and to an amazing degree) periodic pulsations in pitch, in intensity, and in timbre—each of which has its own individual pulsation. It is the fusing of the three, when each prevails in its proper degree, which imparts to them a vibrato of such extent and rate as gives a pleasing flexibility, tenderness, and richness to the tone.

"The four aspects of sound waves are frequency,

intensity, form, and duration. Frequency determines pitch, denotes the number of vibrations per second. Intensity, which determines loudness, denotes the physical power or strength of the sound wave and is represented primarily by the width or amplitude of the wave. The form of the wave is represented by a tonal spectrum and determines the timbre of a sound. The term duration is self-explanatory. Since the human organism is capable of registering, and responds to each of these four characteristics of the sound wave, we hear in music four basic elements of sound; pitch, loudness, timbre, and time."

In his laboratory experiments with phonograph records which are reproductions of songs sung by twenty-nine singers (among them Mmes. Galli-Curci, Homer, Jeritza, Ponselle, Rethberg, Schumann-Heink and Tetrizzini and MM. Caruso, Chaliapin, Crooks, de Luca, Gigli, Martinelli and Tibbett), Dr. Seashore has discovered that:

"1. The pitch extent (i.e., the width of the pulsation of pitch) averages about a semi-tone (actually about five times greater than it is heard by the expert listener).

"2. The intensity vibrato (averaging about 6.5 pulsations per second) is less frequent, less regular, and less prominent perceptually than the pitch vibrato. It is probably secondary to it, and is more modified by room resonance. The phase relationship between the two varies widely.

"3. The timbre vibrato (the most variable and complex factor in the musical tone) is not, like the pitch or

intensity vibrato, the awareness of a specific periodicity in each specific partial, but rather the awareness of added richness and mellowness to the tone in the form of sonance."

Dr. Seashore makes a telling point when he states that "many musicians recognize and demand the presence of the vibrato, *but* regard it as the *quality* of the tone, not associated with the periodic pulsations." He states further that "all recognized professional singers sing with a pitch vibrato in about 95 per cent of their tones."

Some distinguished artists, Dr. Seashore finds, have a regularity in periodic pulsations from one tone to the next whereas others vary in that respect. He declares that there is no marked difference in these pulsations in men's and women's voices; and that, odd though it may appear, there is a wider pulsation in short notes than long ones (despite the fact that the ear hears the reverse).

Emphasizing the under-estimation of what one hears to what actually is sounded, these experiments disclose that:

"The larger the pitch and intensity extent, the more will it be underestimated.

"The faster the rate, within limits, the more will the rate be underestimated (which doubtless explains why a markedly slow vibrato is held to be more objectionable than the markedly rapid one—the 'tremolo').

"The richer the tone the more the extent will be underestimated.

"For good singing, the pitch extent and intensity extent

are heard as a small fraction of their true extent.

“Instead of the full extent of the pulsation we tend to hear only the extent of deviation from the mean pitch or intensity.

“The end result in hearing may be higher or lower than this, depending upon the presence or absence of other motives for illusion.

“These reductions in the extent of hearing of pulsations tend to make the actual vibrato tolerable.”

Reminding that what is heard varies with the individual capacity, and training, Dr. Seashores goes on to say: “We have already seen that such factors as rate, regularity, degree of extent in pitch, intensity and timbre changes influence the perceptibility of the pulsation. Such is the situation the musician encounters in facing an audience and attempting to convey to each listener a beautiful vibrato—it is impossible. What one hears another does not hear. Herein lies the foundation of musical criticism. The musician is at the mercy of the critic’s ear, and his treatment depends on whether that ear is sensitive, mediocre, or dull. It depends upon whether the critic is in a critical mood or in an esthetic mood of listening. (Also, a number of other factors Dr. Seashore does not mention.) Indeed, here all is illusion. The singer, critic, and each member of the audience hears and thinks differently, each judging by his own standard.” All of which constitutes further evidence of the importance of a teacher’s possessing an inherently keen hearing sense, plus its

fullest possible development.

Concluding a summarization of a few of Dr. Seashore's very extensive findings, which cover some 40,000 words, it is evident that "a moderate vibrato is frequently not recognized as such, but merely as a certain quality of tone, such as softness, flexibility or undifferentiated richness; no pulsation is heard."

Right here, it would seem, is the milk in this particular cocoanut. A moderate extent of pulsation in pitch, attended by synchronous pulsations of intensity (loudness) and timbre, contribute flexibility, tenderness and richness to a tone which, without such pleasing elements, would tend to be colorless and dead. But—these pulsations must be moderate in extent, and synchronous in character; otherwise even the untrained or commonplace hearing sense will be offended.

OFF - PITCH SINGING

7.

Singing off pitch, or out of tune, is a fault so common among even admittedly exceptional artists that one is moved to wonder if such a thing as perfect-pitch singing really exists. Everyone with a keen hearing sense flinches when a singer sounds a tone that is either below or above the true pitch; and even the one possessing only a moderately sensitive hearing will experience aural discomfort, perhaps without knowing precisely why.

There are, of course, degrees of pitch deviation as well as the frequency of that unfortunate habit. A very occasional lapse in pitch is forgivable. It demands being forgiven for the reason that in public singing some perfectly valid cause may be responsible—such as physical indisposition of one sort or another; an overwrought mental state during the interpretation of a piece of music which offers a vocally exacting spot; apprehensiveness or mental indecision; bodily or vocal fatigue. So, occasional lapses must be expected . . . even among those whose pitch exactness is known to be an outstanding quality.

Far too many singers, however, (and some of these are prominently successful) habitually deliver an excessive number of faultily sung pitches in the course of an

appearance in concert, recital or opera. It is not always possible to say what is responsible for such an habitual fault, especially when the offender has a generally good technique. Putting one's finger on the underlying cause can be as perplexing as endeavoring to make it clear why a singer with a "throaty" or "nasal" or some other kind of unacceptable technique rarely sings flat or sharp. There are instances where a singer's sense of hearing his own voice is inexact—even though that singer may have an acute ear for tones other than those he himself makes.

Whatever is at the bottom of the more or less regular offender of accurate intonation, there is no escaping its widespread unpopularity. It is passed by, now and again, where an artist has much otherwise to offer that is uncommonly good. But in quite a number of instances there would appear little excuse for what prompts so many listeners to wriggle uncomfortably at hearing notes that are just a shade under the note the singer has striven to sound. For "singing flat" is more displeasing than singing sharp (a rarer thing); and an auditor's teeth can be put on edge by a singer who is just a few vibrations below the true pitch to almost the same extent as by being a quarter of a tone away from where he should be. As for the person who sings "off key," which means singing successive pitches either flat or sharp; its occurrence can spell musical oblivion for whoever is so unfortunate as to trip over that terrifying obstacle.

I have had singers tell me that at the start of their studies they sang perfectly in tune. That as they went on, acquiring vocal facility and growth in the richness and power of their tones, they ultimately found themselves being corrected during a lesson, or criticized publicly for slighting right pitches at certain places. Some of these confidants have confessed to being unconscious of their lapses, just as others have admitted their inability to pull up to or to come down to the pitch sought when they realized that they were either flat or sharp. They have been a unit, one and all, in declaring that despite their general vocal improvements they have striven vainly to correct their off-pitch difficulties.

What is confusing in attempts unerringly to analyze a cause is that—as with the vibrato—many singers who are unable technically to sound free and well made tones throughout the entire compass of their voices rarely sing out of tune. Is the pitch lapse a matter of the singer's having a defective hearing sense? Is it a constitutional fault? Why will a singer flat on several pitches in the middle or lower part of the voice and yet sound all the high pitches correctly? What causes deviations by others who are accurate enough everywhere save on their high or highest pitches? And is there any positive, unfailing, cure for this lamentable failing? . . . where the afflicted one has a provenly good hearing sense.

Attempting to lay down general rules for the correction of every type of habitual off-pitch singing is impossible.

There are numerous instances wherein the underlying causes are the same; and in such cases the corrective remedies can be the same. Surprisingly often the trouble will lie in a single fault, such as lack of adequate breath support; striving to make a tone or tones on too broad a scale, in the desire for power; mentally anticipating a pitch immediately following the one which is faultily sung and which is therefore slighted; apprehensiveness that a pitch (usually a high one) will not come off as desired, the result being a constriction of certain muscles which should not be unduly tensed; a too-relaxed, or flabby, way of singing which is often the foundation for flatting pitches; an excitable, illy considered way of singing which not infrequently induces sharpening.

I can think of a few—a very few—singers whom I have heard often during the past thirty years whose pitches were unfailingly true. I refer to several great artists, and perhaps three or four excellent artists who were not all technically I would have liked. This select group, of different periods, had the faculty of hitting their pitches with seeming squareness. Even where one of this select group lacked free and well turned high tones, and must consequently have missed some of the highest overtones, he nevertheless gave me that feeling of comfort which invariably is experienced when listening to tones which are sounded in their center.

This facility for accurate intonation, whether natural or acquired, is a prime asset to one who would impart

pleasure to others through his singing.

When the voice is of agreeable texture, and no undue vibrato likewise is present, the first requisites to generally acceptable singing are at hand. If, in addition, the singer has musicality and a reasonable measure of personableness, he can look forward to some happy moments—for himself as well as providing them for others.

During the course of every music season it is necessary for me to attend several hundred performances of various kinds: concerts in which solo singers participate, recitals, and opera. I hear many excellent voices, some of them exceptional. Some of these singers are technically as well as interpretively proficient; but the majority lack, in portions of their respective voices, tones physically unconstricted and which match in relative quality their remaining tones. With virtually no exception, these singers deliver in nearly every composition sung several tones that are out of tune. And that unfortunate failing is instantly pounced on by the critics in their reviews, and is passed on through the various channels to those who might otherwise engage some of these singers for paying engagements.

It is my firm belief that off-pitch singing is curable—where the candidate for cure has an accurate hearing sense, good health, and moderate vocal resources. Providing, also, that the singer is patient, persistent, submissive, and eager in his work with the person qualified to aid in the cure. The remedy—and I have observed it

applied and found effective—is the acquiring of such a development and control of the voice as I have pointed out in a previous chapter of this book. For when this proficiency is gained the singer feels and hears the tone, simultaneously. He comes at length to a use of his entire vocal mechanism in one way—and one way only. There is no “manipulation” of this tone or that; no unwarranted shifting of some part of the mechanism to sing a high tone, or distorting a pure vowel-mould into something that is neither one thing or another.

Singing in the technical way I advocate does more, even, than to enable one to sing any succession of long or short pitches, that lie within one’s compass, on any word, and with every tone matching in relative quality every other tone. It goes even beyond affording relative physical ease and mental certainty to the singer; of enabling the realization, in fullest measure, of all the possibilities in a voice. Singing in the manner I advocate makes off-pitch singing a lapse rarely experienced.

I will not go so far as to assert that singers with a full command of that technique never will sing out of tune. What I do assert is that they will offend in that respect so seldom that such offense will be as nothing to those who derive enjoyment from the other major plus qualities offered.

MANAGERS AND PUBLICIZING

8.

Possession of any salable article or commodity or personal service is of very little value unless a buyer can be found. The singer provenly qualified to compete for engagements must have someone competent and diligent enough to secure them for him. Otherwise (unless he is able to paddle his own business canoe, an impossibility save in a small way) he is likely to sing chiefly to keep his spirits up.

One of the principal factors in a singer's success is able management. Failure to obtain that character of personal representation can be responsible for lack of success. There are instances wherein astute and indefatigable endeavors on the part of a management have lifted into prominence and affluence singers who were seemingly getting nowhere in other managerial hands.

Managing the professional affairs of a singer is a complicated and highly specialized calling. There are different types of managements, necessitated by the different fields in which singers work; and they are of varying worth, just as are the singers they represent. The foremost and most important of the musical class in the United States and Canada is that best identified by the

phrase "music bureau." It may be any management, ranging from one that is modest and books on a modest scale a few artist-attractions (instrumentalists as well as singers), right up to the two largest and best known which are dominated by the capital of two still larger corporations.

There is also the personal representative, who may act in that capacity for one of the stars and arrange concert and radio bookings through a management more fully equipped for that sort of activity; the agent who operates solely with managers of musical shows, night clubs, radio, and motion pictures; and still another type of agent (usually European) who acts for his foreign clients in their American activities, and for his American clients seeking opera or concert appearances in Europe.

While the music bureau managements are to be found in a few cities other than New York, it is in this metropolis that the ranking ones have their headquarters . . . due to New York's being the music center on the North American continent.

The two largest music bureaus are directed by able and experienced men who operated independently for themselves prior to arrangements concluded only a few years ago which created these formidable units. Fully personneled, and alert to all they regard as progressive and likely to broaden their sphere of operation, these two managements represent some two hundred and more artist-attractions. They include singers, pianists, violinists,

'cellists, instrumental and singing groups, dancers and dance organizations, and conductors. Contracts with their clients are usually for all rights, from concert and opera appearances right on to pictures and radio; and these contracts sometimes provide for world rights.

Each of these two major managements has a separate organization which forms and assists associations in more than four hundred communities (cities as well as towns) which offer, in each instance, a series of concerts every season. Each civic or community association has its memberships which are presented with three, four, or five entertainments of mixed character in exchange for a fixed sum. Thus, in addition to the entertainment and cultural development of thousands of people, a certain number of engagements are assured to those singers, instrumentalists and dancers who are deemed fitting to enlist the approval of these many audiences.

The "independent" music bureau managements whose headquarters are in New York are about one dozen. They represent something like one hundred and twenty-five artist-attractions of various kinds, of which a number are eminent. Among the remainder are some admirable artists whose fees for a single appearance range from \$350 down to \$200; but the majority of whose professional affairs are in these independent managements' hands receive less.

Next in order come the few dependable managements which concentrate almost solely on obtaining radio and

motion picture engagements for their clients; and a sprinkling of what one may designate as "Broadway" agents. The clients of the latter are singers, instrumentalists, bands, and orchestras of the "popular" variety and, save for such engagements as are open in musical shows, are almost never heard and seen where the best music is performed.

Because New York is the center from which most of this nation's music and allied entertainment radiates, the "big time" attractions of all classes prefer being identified with managements which are located there. A few of the other large cities have their artist-attraction managements, but if, in addition to these, one excepts Los Angeles and Hollywood—where the motion picture and radio agencies predominate—there are none of national prominence.

It is therefore natural for the singer, who is eager to begin his career, to glance New York-wards . . . unless he happens to be already on that particular ground. And the chances are that if he isn't a foreigner who has made enough of a name that is familiar to the New York managements, he will scarcely find any door-mat with the word "welcome" when he starts his quest.

The reason, quite obviously, is that the supply of artist-attractions among singers is greatly in excess of the demand for their services. This being the case, the first task is to interest a management . . . even to the extent of being granted an audition. Already representing about as many singers as it can do justice to (sometimes more),

virtually every New York management is a willing listener only to someone who comes highly recommended. The exception is generally when the newcomer, in addition to possessing something the public will respond to, has the cash capital for exploitation that justifies a management in devoting special attention to that singer's interests.

It must not be assumed that a respected management will allow itself to be swayed by financial inducements alone. Responsible managements have their prestige to consider, and at all times. They cannot afford to urge upon a client (a local management, club, college or university music course, or other organization) the engagement of a singer who is not all he is declared to be as an artist. No reputable manager would dare offer a singer, no matter to whom or for what possible engagement, unless he had confidence in that singer's qualifications. This does not mean that the prospective client will unfailingly accept for engagement the proffered singer. It does mean, however, that (where an audition figures) even if the decision be in the negative the candidate for the post has at least demonstrated some right to have been considered.

There are managements, of course, who have no such business ethics; or, having them, whose judgment of a singer's resources and marketability generally is not over-accurate. There are others, it must be regretfully admitted, whose methods are none too scrupulous.

Choosing a manager who has the experience, knowl-

edge, acquaintance and proper ethics is, therefore, the first concern of the candidate for a career. One may succeed in securing such a manager and yet discover the engagements hoped for to be few and far between. Such experiences not only have happened, but are always happening; an outcome by no means chargeable, in every such instance, to the manager.

Scarcity of engagements, or none at all, during a singer's first season may be due to any one of a number of causes, or to several. One is the period of the season at which the managerial arrangement is concluded. If it be following a time when most of the possible contracts have been signed, then the singer must be content with what can be had from those yet open, and a possible engagement or two arising from the withdrawal of a previously engaged singer because of illness. Perhaps the contract between singer and manager has been executed some time before, or just after, most of the opportunities in opera, radio, or musical shows are available.

Although such openings are to be had at nearly all times in the course of every year, there are certain ripe periods. One could scarcely expect to find a berth at the Metropolitan in the middle of the season; or to look for an array of opportunities in radio when most of the thirteen-week programs had been signed up. Posts for the summer opera performances are usually filled some time before the scheduled opening date; the artists for the various serious opera performances of a regular season are nearly

always contracted for months ahead. And September is no month to sign with a management and anticipate the same possibilities for concert engagements which would have prevailed had the negotiations been concluded early during the preceding spring.

Time, therefore, is quite evidently a factor in the securing of an engagement or engagements for a singer—although the manager be capable, and all the other requisites to that end are at hand. Even when those requisites do prevail, disappointment can ensue. The principal cause is due to the widespread competition; for, as in all fields of human endeavor, nowadays, it is a buyer's market rather than a seller's.

Since the majority of career-beginners find themselves with a limited cash capital, or none at all, the problem of getting a start is generally intensified. The singer thus handicapped faces a bleak outlook, unless he has the exceptional to offer. In such circumstances he may find a management willing to add him to its list of attractions, and to do its utmost in that singer's behalf. Yet the manager must have circulars setting forth the singer's qualifications, as well as other publicity aids, if the goal be in the concert field. And most managements insist upon a New York recital before signing a young singer; the reason being that out-of-town "local managers," clubs and others engaging singers place so much reliance upon favorable reviews by the New York music critics that they are regarded as essential sales-aids to securing concert

bookings. Concert careers are launched, and developed without that assistance; but they are achieved only by dint of hard and persistent effort, starting with modest beginnings and for corresponding fees.

All too often the New York recital turns out badly for the aspiring singer. Conscious of all that is at stake, he is fortunate if what he does is representative of his best. He may choose an afternoon or an evening when the first-line critics of the New York daily press are not free to attend his recital, or being free, are disinclined to bother with another *début*—because every New York music season is deluged with newcomer singers whose abilities, save in a few instances, are undeserving of consideration by either public or press. Where the assistant reviewers cover a newcomer's recital, the accomplishment must be decidedly above the average to gain more than a brief notice—in which too little may appear that is of value to be effective for publicizing use.

Of the fifty or more young men and women who have gained New York *début* recitals in the past few years, either through winning competitions yielding that reward or the generosity of patrons who have personally defrayed the expenses, only a small number are earning livelihoods. The conclusion, once again, is obvious: there are far too many of these singers who, though they have considerable to offer, still lack a sufficient degree of the requisites needed to lift them to the desirable places. Some, persisting, may yet reach one of those places; but the majority cannot.

The opera-minded singer need not burden himself with a New York recital. Not if opera alone is his objective. Yet, as I have previously pointed out, the financial rewards in serious opera never can be very substantial for any save those with exceptional voices and talent. The services of managers can figure importantly in this sphere, and yet most managers are disinclined to give much of their time for this purpose to any young newcomer who seemingly hasn't unusual possibilities. Where the desire is comic opera (or what is termed a musical show) the situations brightens, because the monetary return can be considerable—to manager as well as his principal.

Anyone can obtain an audition before the Metropolitan's judging committee. Auditions are held at regular intervals; but the majority of candidates are so lacking in voice and style that it is seldom a singer is asked to sing a second aria. What the average young singer hears is a loud "thank you," which probably sends him from the stage wondering why he has been so summarily dealt with. When the candidate's ego is not alone responsible, the teacher who permits an unqualified pupil to attempt the impossible injures his own professional standing.

Rejection of a genuinely talented candidate does not mean, however, that he hasn't Metropolitan Opera potentialities, and may not eventually land there. As I have stated before, on preceding pages, there is a vast difference in the degrees of expert listeners' hearing; and it is no infrequent occurrence for a highly qualified judge to find

himself changing, at a second audition, the opinion he formed of the singer at the earlier one. It is no reflection upon the judge, for the singer, for one reason or another, may have bettered his first endeavor. Also (and this sort of thing does happen) a judge may not be at his physical or mental best during an audition, and thus, quite pardonably, be unfit to do justice either to himself or the singer in reaching a decision.

The singer should persist, therefore, despite any adverse early verdicts. I make one proviso, however: He must have made reasonably sure that what he has to offer vocally, artistically, and otherwise conforms in marked measure to the resources the post demands. He cannot merely be "pretty good," because that class not only isn't wanted but any member of it is certain to be eased out of a job if, through some chance, he happens to get in.

Every artist-attraction management will exert itself in behalf of the singer who has an unusual voice and unusual singing talent. But such exertions are slight when compared to what the management will do if, in addition, the singer has been as liberally endowed with good looks and personality. Knowing the public's susceptibility to what delights the sight, every manager (usually susceptible, himself) responds more readily to what the singer does vocally if the candidate arrests the eye.

Everyone is moved to make certain allowances for the singer where the personableness and personality are marked. The vocal shortcomings must not dip below a

reasonable level, of course; still, with these two visual qualities, plus that of showmanship, their possessor can travel far in either opera or concert even though voice and interpretive art are not of the highest order. While it is more to the advantage of women singers to be given these plus resources, the men who have them profit too. Nobody has yet determined the extent to which these gifts figure in singing success, but discerning opinions rate it as a factor ranging between fifty and sixty per cent. Conversely, a poor physique, facial unattractiveness, and the lack of animation and showmanship call for more voice and more interpretive art than otherwise would be necessary.

All of which prompts me again to repeat the query: What have you got to make a singing career, and how much of it?

If the answer be "plenty," then the road that leads upward can safely be undertaken. But it must be "plenty"; and along with it a willingness to work, to persist, and to be patient under the innumerable trials which are sure to come. No singing success which is worth having can be attained, and maintained, without enduring a great deal and making certain sacrifices. Experience being one of the foremost of teachers, reaching the top, or a place somewhere near it, cannot be expected until one has acquired experience.

I am in accord with those who believe in encouraging whoever has what appears to be almost enough to

warrant attempting a career. Because development and experience now and again combine to bring out latent abilities which are not discernible, even to the expert, before development and experience have been called into play.

Managements and their ways, since the human element is involved, can and do differ. The most efficient make mistakes, just as those less efficient sometimes accomplish things in excess of their mean average. But an intelligent candidate for a singing career has open to him sources of information concerning the standing, character, and methods of any management before deciding to entrust with that management the business portion of his professional destiny. Once having so decided, it is becoming for the singer to place confidence in his management; to coöperate with it to the utmost, and even acquiesce in what at times will seem to him to be almost unreasonable requests. For there will come auditions he may feel he should not make; appearances he may not wish to accept; and occasions when to sing under temporary physical disability to maintain or to acquire prestige for dependability means a possible risk of being adjudged less capable than he really is.

Difficult enough to secure all, and the best, engagements he feels his star attractions should have, the ablest manager finds it a more complicated task to launch and build a singer-client's career.

He usually earns all he receives in commissions, and all

too often much more; because, accepting a newcomer client on a purely commission basis, he may devote time and skill in dispatching letters, telegrams, and in personal solicitation without any return—efforts which might have been productive to him were they utilized elsewhere.

Some managements demand monthly retainers from unknown singers who seek their aid. A reasonable sum is no more than fair for their expert endeavors and time, even if no engagements for the singer are forthcoming. For no management will guarantee engagements to any save the most scintillating star, and rarely even then. Twenty per cent of a singer's fees is the prevailing rate of compensation. When a retainer does figure, it is customary for the management to credit these sums against possible fees to be earned.

Highly essential to advancing a singer in his career—whether he be a beginner or well established—is publicity material of various kinds. He should, in any event, have an illustrated folder or circular which carries a reproduction of his photograph and text setting forth the type and the characteristics of his voice, what engagements he is prepared to fill, and whatever else is likely to catch and hold the attention of a possible manager-patron. If he has already sung publicly, and has critical reviews of a favorable nature, excerpts from these reviews can be used to advantage as a part of such an above mentioned folder.

But that piece of publicity literature represents only a part of what is necessary—if the management is to have

helpful tools with which to work in his client's behalf. Photographs, cuts of various sizes of the client in different photographed poses, and advertising space carried in the leading music journals are of vital importance as aids to management and singer; and if a truly effective campaign in the singer's interests is desired, none can well be omitted. For it should be borne in mind that prospective purchasers of the singer's services (who operate in every part of the United States and Canada, as well as in Europe) must become acquainted with the singer and his qualifications. That acquaintance is a matter of gradual development, through various publicity mediums; and they are imperative, otherwise the management must rely solely upon the slower process of communicating the information through letters, occasional pieces of printed literature, and his own selling-talk during the necessarily infrequent personal calls in the course of his business traveling. Once bookings actually are made, there will be need for window-cards; possibly, as the engagements grow in number and importance, for three-sheet posters. The final aid in a thorough publicity campaign is the material prepared and sent out to newspapers and magazines. This calls for the services of one skilled in formulating and writing stories designed to catch the favorable attention of editors, and the use of photographs.

Advertising is really more than "the life of trade"; it is its life-blood. And few persons, whatever their calling or rank in that calling, fail in some degree to benefit through

advertising. For it manifests itself in three distinct mediums: through the spoken word, the written word, and the printed word . . . with which latter medium the picture figures, and (nowadays) the motion-pictures.

A distinguished physician or surgeon, an attorney of eminence, a scientist, economist, or expert in some other field is "called" to some special task or higher post through words uttered in his behalf. Likewise, the singer is aided in becoming known, and looked upon with favor, through skillful endeavors which place his accomplishments, his human-interest activities, his personality, and his photograph before persons likely to engage his services and others who may want to pay money to hear him sing. The outlet for all these are through the reading columns of the daily, weekly, and monthly press, and the paid advertising columns of such of them as will reach most effectively those persons the artist seeks to impress by specially prepared messages designed to aid in securing engagements.

Most of the stars, near-stars, and those admirable artists whose contributions to the music life of the people often equal and sometimes surpass in actual artistic worth that of some of the stars, appreciate the need for and employ widespread campaigns of publicity—in which material and photographs for the reading columns of the public press, and paid advertising are religiously used. Though firmly established, they appreciate both the importance and the value of advertising. Although a few of the most solidly entrenched stars, favored by widespread publicity

in the columns of the daily press and magazines (and the still more limited few who have made motion pictures) are conscious that even without the aid of paid advertising they still would not lack in engagements—they nevertheless persist in spreading before local managements, opera impresarios, clubs and other organizations advertisements containing special messages. It is their realization that vigilance and the utilization of every possible means in maintaining a position won is as imperative as has been its use as an aid to gain that position. For nothing ever stands quite still; neither the beauty and usefulness of one's voice and art, or the preëminence which has been acquired through the efforts to reach it. Finally, there is always the rising unknown who may be just around the corner, ready and able to challenge the distinguished artist's position.

Not many of the career-beginners have the cash capital needed for much of an advertising campaign; and that is one of the factors which retards their more rapid advancement, and their acceptance by the local managements and others who may have need for their services. The opera aspirants have less need for paid advertising than those seeking concert appearances. Yet it is an admitted fact that the more one's name and photographs appear on printed pages which reach the eyes of opera impresarios, the better. One is kept more constantly in mind if one is read, as well as talked, about.

So—we find that advertising is helpful in three ways:

as an aid to the management in securing engagements; to gain prestige; and then, having gained it, to maintain it. It is constant reiteration that does this. It is not sufficient to tell people just once who and what an artist is and has done and can do . . . and then feel that it will all be forever remembered. The national advertisers know this; and by constantly keeping their products before the people by using every known publicity medium they maintain their often hard-won places, and sell more of those products than otherwise would have been possible. As a great advertising expert once said: "Tell the people; tell them again; and then keep on telling them."

There comes a time to some singers when foreign appearances seem wise. Either to expand their fields of activities, or to help in building or enlarging prestige. Those who are well established—whether in concert or opera, or mayhap in both—are "placed" satisfactorily by their own managements who have the necessary foreign contacts to negotiate arrangements to the desired ends. If the objective be concertizing it is the rising singer who must take into account the monetary expense, since auditoriums must be rented in every European city where an appearance is desired and various other fees paid—including that of the manager who confines himself to working in Europe in Americans' behalf or in the Americas in the interest of European artists. Selecting a dependable European manager who will perform his duties capably calls for a deal of care; for while a number are to be had,

there are instances wherein American singers discovered their selection to have proved unfortunate only after the tour had gone too far to make a change.

Opera engagements in Europe for any American singers save the experienced and well known, are nowadays difficult to find. They can be obtained, but only in circumstances that attach an expense to the singer . . . the unknown or little known singer who seeks experience, and such prestige as may arise from European appearances.

As in other spheres of present-day human endeavor, those open to the singer present innumerable problems. It is well, as in the acquiring of technical and interpretive proficiency, to be content to move deliberately; not to be in a hurry; and to decide upon ways only after thorough investigation and weighing show them to be seemingly wise for the career-candidate to follow.

9.

There is a somewhat ordinary expression which has gained such widespread use and acceptance as to have become eloquent in all it implies. Often attached to what is commonly known as "bluff," it applies no less strongly to some worthwhile achievement. That expression is: "putting it over."

When a singer has achieved a success through the employment of legitimate means, he may rightfully be said to have "put it over." When that singer continues successfully in his career he can be pointed out as one who has put *himself* over.

I make use of the phrase, Putting It Over, as a heading for this particular chapter because it is all-inclusive in covering several vital essentials called for in making a successful singing career; essentials other than those of voice alone, of voice and exceptional technique combined.

One may have no more than a fair singing voice and a fair technical use of that voice and still go far if he was personableness or magnetism, a gift of or the ability to acquire showmanship, musicianship or a musicianly way of singing, and a correct pronunciation and distinct enunciation of text.

Many a singer blessed with a splendid voice has fallen by the professional wayside because of expressionless singing, and a stage deportment so constrained as to render impossible a harmonious contact between himself and his auditors.

Hosts of other singers, equally endowed with voice, take such liberties with the musical portions of their songs as to impair their meaning to listeners who are sensitive to tempi, rhythm, proper note and rest values, and that esthetic "give and take" to phrases which endows a song with much of its life and color.

There are far too many singers, also, who "mouth" their words in a careless forming of vowels (which makes them neither one nor the other, but a mixture of two vowels) and in the slighting or complete elimination of consonants—all of which results in an incorrect pronunciation and a poor enunciation.

Much is forgiven a singer who delivers a song in its proper mood, whose diction (pronunciation and enunciation) and a combined projection of text and music make the joined message of poet and composer a harmonious unit that has been convincingly conveyed. Such a singer may have only a moderately good voice and yet be able to charm his listeners through an artistry which results in a smooth, vivid, and sincere interpretation.

Before taking up the highly important factors of personality and showmanship, other factors, touching interpretation, demand some detailed consideration.

First of all comes the study of a song.

Since the music of most songs is set to a text (rather than setting text to music), one should approach that portion of a song before studying the music. The prevailing custom is to "look through" a song, the singer singing it, more or less roughly, to get the feel of it. In the majority of instances this superficial approach to text and music is attended by prime attention given to the music, with the words given secondary rather than the first place every text of a well-written song should have. Once too freely indulged, this method of half-learning a piece of music can become a habit not easily broken.

There is no harm in running through a bit of unfamiliar music, the piano part being played by an accompanist, to permit the singer to gather a general idea of the whole. A few singers—and only a few—are capable enough musicians to enable them to study a composition on its musical side without pianistic assistance. Whatever the process followed, once the melody and the harmonic structure have been grasped, diligent study should be given to the text. The meaning of the entire poem, then that of every phrase, and finally the purpose of each word should receive the most thoughtful analysis. When such thoroughness has been followed, the poem will take on a significance impossible to attain by the superficial scrutiny too generally adopted by singers; it will allow one to appraise the music with a clearer understanding of the composer's intentions than would otherwise have been possible.

Some highly conscientious artists speak aloud the words, and become familiar with each phrase, before giving fullest study to the music. Studying a singing composition in this manner—song, aria, or recitative—brings an all-sided grasp that is not alone basically sound but is also of inestimable aid in memorization and retentiveness. Some singing artists defer the actual singing of a song until both words and music have been gone into so fully that putting the two together in a first interpretation results in an approximation of the ultimately polished interpretation. This is the ideal procedure, since no errors of any sort are likely to have been formed. A grave danger threatens when one, eager to sing the composition, undertakes to learn it by such repetitions rather than giving it the careful study every unfamiliar composition should have.

One of these dangers (and it can wreck a singer when it obtrudes during a public appearance) is an inexact learning of words and music. I mean by this to gather an impression of what certain words are, and the values of certain notes, which is incorrect . . . during the hurried “going through” of an unfamiliar composition. Reading it at sight, the singer is almost sure to stumble over some of the words as well as some of the notes. A dozen such mistakes may have been committed during the first two or three of these impromptu readings. They probably will be reduced in number during the fifth or sixth reading; and yet, it is astonishing how momentary mistakes of this kind can crop up during a public performance, under a

nervous tension that so often prompts one to do something, half automatically, which we know to be an act of the sub-conscious mind. Because of this it is safer to commit no errors in any first attempts towards learning a song.

Still another danger arises from trying to sing an unfamiliar composition before it has been so well learned that one is able to sing with complete vocal freedom. Fumbling with words and music, the singer cannot avoid using his voice in a technically careless manner. If he persists in singing the unlearned song, he may find that having "put the song in the throat" (as Italians express it) in the wrong way, he sometimes finds it surprisingly difficult to change to the right way.

Taking infinite pains in a correct learning of words and music of a song is the only method that can lead to an ultimately first-rate interpretation . . . providing, of course, that one forms pure vowels and sounds the consonants so that each is clearly audible to the listener. For there can be, and often is, an acceptable interpretation musically which leaves something to be desired on the diction side. Wherefore, the words and the ability to enunciate them distinctly must come first, thereafter the music. It is then, and then only, that the song, as an entity, takes on a completeness which gives it preëminence because it becomes a story adorned and made complete by the music.

Mushy diction is frequently caused by a singer's chief anxiety and thought being directed upon his tones. I can-

not agree with those who contend that a clear articulation of words is a basis for a first-rate singing technique. My investigations and experience have taught me that correctly formed and projected tones make relatively simple an excellent diction. For it is then that the singer finds it physically easiest to form pure vowel moulds in song, and to sound consonants (wherever they appear in any word) with distinctness. Superior diction is an asset, I concede, of some singers whose technique is faulty; and that fact, in itself, is proof enough that one may have a superior diction and still form and project the tones in a technically inferior manner.

Forming pure vowel moulds is the basis of good diction—in any language. In English there is too prevalent a tendency to form “a” so that it becomes a combination of “a” and “e”; to make “e” sloppily; to cause “i” to take on a hint of “ah”; to impart to “o” the sound of “aw”; to form “u” with a slurring of “e” as a preliminary. Slipshod forming of modifications of two vowels which distorts the purity of the intended one is another common fault of most singers. As for the consonants—especially those at the beginning and ending of words—they are rarely sounded cleanly; all too often they are so slighted, when not completely eliminated, as to be inaudible. Still another easily-formed habit to guard against is the introduction of an aspirate (where none belongs) in the middle or at the end of a vowel sustained on a long held note. “Go-o-ing home” is preferable to “Go-*ho*-ing home.”

The absence of a vanishing-point in the Italian vowels, and the finer vowel-shadings in the French and German languages, are difficult enough to sound correctly when spoken by those to whom English is the mother tongue. When sung, these various vowels present added difficulties; and that is one reason why being able to speak, as well as to understand, these languages is a great aid to one who sings in them.

All this—correct pronunciation and distinct enunciation of words, whatever the language—goes to comprise what is termed “good diction.” But there is still another factor required—if the diction, in addition to being “good,” is to be “eloquent.” For the ability to endow every word with the full measure of its expressiveness is rarely encountered. That is why the singer having that gift, or acquiring it, is able to move audiences by bringing out the uttermost meaning of each word; by endowing it with the lightness, seriousness, tenderness, pathos, emotional depth, tragedy or whatever else the poet intended.

That faculty reaches its height when the singer is rich on his emotional side. Because it is then that he feels; that he is not merely pronouncing words as he sings. Experiencing whatever the mood or the emotion denoted by the phrase, and each word which comprises it, he unconsciously supplements what he consciously aims to impart to his interpretation. If the singer be so fortunate as to have a first-rate technique at his command, he colors the tone to suit the color of each word. He makes the tone

expressive in texture as well as in the required degree of its power. It is when the emotionally eloquent singer, even with splendid diction, is technically unable to control his tones to this end that he falls short of the fullest interpretive heights possible. Great though he may be, the sensitive listener is made aware of a lack of what he feels to have been potentially possible.

A song, for a satisfying interpretation, must have all musically which the singer puts into its poetic side. First, naturally, should come the proper tempo; yet that need not mean an exact metronomic beat. For one that is slightly faster or slower than the marking (according as the singer may "feel" its swing) may still be in accordance with the composer's intention. There always is an esthetic latitude which no artist will distort.

Notes and rests, along with rhythm and tempo, constitute the structural portion of the song; yet no composer can put on paper all he has conceived, even with elaborate indications of tempi variations and dynamic shadings. There is always a subtle element which the sensitive and emotional singer is often able to grasp; or failing quite to do so, at least to approximate that subtle element.

Despite all the music hieroglyphics, and word markings, which appear on the pages of a song, considerable is open to the singer in the interpretation he believes to be right. And it may be right, even though it differ in certain respects from the interpretation given it by another artist of corresponding or even superior rank.

It can be approximately "right" because no two artists ever sing a composition thus accepted without indulging in certain variations in the delivery of both text and music. They may be either slight or more pronounced variations, such as: a word strongly emphasized; a phrase subdued; a perceptible pause, before uttering a word or a phrase; a hastening or retarding of a music phrase; a little more or a little less power at another point in the composition; a finely spun tone, rather than one of unchanged power which may be preferred by other singers.

Yet for all such variations, or any others, the composition as a whole may nevertheless have been generally excellent in each interpretation because the structural fundamentals have been adhered to. Whatever the individual touches, neither words nor music have been basically altered. The "tradition," where there is tradition, has been respected.

Where one interpretation may satisfy a certain group of listeners, a different interpretation may prove to be the one preferred by still another listening group. It resolves into a matter of personal taste which, fortunately perhaps, is an ever present factor touching human achievement. The singer's own taste is also subject to change, as is constantly revealed in his own interpretations of a given composition—which never are done twice in precisely the same way.

It is this variable human element which makes the individual interpretation unfailingly superior to the mechanical. The machine never varies; and must therefore,

for all its minute perfection in repetition, be forever the same. The individual, endowed with the ability to introduce new touches of color into each fresh interpretation, is ever changeable—in just the degree to make him unique.

One may sing technically well, have a fine voice, and yet arouse no interest despite excellent diction and musicianship. The fault may, and usually does, lie with lack of style. Style—or manner—is a quality slowly acquired. Even where one has it naturally, a deal of experience is demanded to ripen it into something authoritative and mellow. Style can become most impressive when it is in-born in the singer. Though possible to acquire, there is rarely an instance where the cold mechanical singer, though almost letter-perfect, can conceal from his auditors his temperamental shortcomings.

There is a fine line of distinction which separates the musically letter-perfect interpretation of a song from the one which, while musicianly, is distinguished by occasional legitimate departures from preciseness in note and rest values, and from a strict maintenance of every structural detail as indicated on the printed pages of that song. For to sing every note exactly as it is set down on paper; to respect each rest to the uttermost degree; and to go in strict time, even to preserving it relatively in the accelerandos and ritards, can make an interpretation about as interesting as having it ground out on the sort of barrel-organ one hears in a street.

Musical liberties—so long as they do not border upon license—are indispensable to a free and musically eloquent interpretation. What matter if a certain quarter-note be slightly lengthened, if the singer feels the swing that way to be the more natural (so long as he *knows* that it is a quarter-note, not a dotted-quarter)? Why not clip a note short to gain a desired effect, if the singer does it artistically? And who has the right to dispute the “carrying over of a phrase” so that, for dramatic emphasis, two are sung with one breath . . . when it is permissible and done so authoritatively as to achieve its purpose?

“Borrowings” from some portions of a song’s music are not only permissible but necessary, if the interpretation is to have musical freedom and ease—so long as those borrowings are not exaggerations and are rightly repaid. And there are further liberties in departing from a too strict observance of dynamic markings which the singer must take—if he would escape reflecting to his auditors a feeling of being mechanical.

These points, along with others, fall in the category of legitimate musical liberties; and they figure largely in forming interpretive style. They do not include, however, a failure to attack squarely a pitch . . . especially at the beginning of a song, or any other one phrase. For nothing is so aurally objectionable as the habit of sliding into a pitch, from one which is a few vibrations below or above the pitch intended. Equally to be condemned is “scooping” the tone, a fault all too easily cultivated by some sing-

ers when a high pitch must be sounded after some musical pause. The singer should also avoid an overuse of the portamento; while a tendency to grunt audibly on releasing the final note of a phrase, and to prolong unduly an extreme top note, are signs of poor taste and bad musical judgment.

∇ Diligent study, practice, experience, and listening to eminent artists helps to form style. It is relatively intangible, too; something which is not easily defined, despite its being so readily recognizable when heard and felt. In addition to the matters already touched upon, style is also manifested in some particular way in which a phrase is turned; in the delivery of some musical ornament; the broadening of a sequence of notes; the confident poise of the artist, and in the smooth and easy assurance reflected in his interpretation as a whole. Style is unmistakable, and one of the precious assets leading to singing success.

Far too many singers attempt important public appearances before gaining a sufficient degree of style to command critical approval. Impatience is responsible. The itch to get a start too often uncontrollable, and always fatal to achieving artistic results. Few of the general run of aspiring singers appear willing to wait; to go slowly. Time is passing; others are being heard in public, so why shouldn't they be? Ego and ignorance and imprudence thus join in throwing before that type of singer a barrier he cannot pass. And so another endeavor brings the inevitable disappointment.

The wise singer may not be content in deferring his first important appearance until he is unmistakably ready, but he will restrain whatever impatience he may feel. Such a course always brings its reward. It is infinitely more gratifying, and pays higher dividends, to have people exclaim: "Where have you been that we never heard of you before now?" The singer who proceeds in this way has no steps to retrace. He can go on; and he usually does. For his confidence in himself has been strengthened, his judgment confirmed; and if he maintains caution he will continue to undertake nothing he is not sure he can bring off.

I have stated elsewhere that personableness and personality are tremendous aids in a singer's success. Yet one may have personality and still succeed without personableness. While the latter is an asset, the former is the greater one. The remark "he's got something" is now and again made with reference to a singer whose physical appearance may be anything but attractive. That "something" which arrests an assemblage of people is magnetism. He is a personality; or, if not altogether that at the moment, he radiates personality. In other words, he has a certain quality that dominates; that commands favorable attention. Thus, even before he opens his mouth to sing, he has gained a degree of approbation.

A singer's bearing as he walks out on a stage (whether in a concert or opera appearance) will elicit attention or else little beyond a casual glance. He is there. His assemblage will wonder, "What of it?" if he fails to radiate

personality. If he is magnetic, then the attitude will be one of interest. And in every case where lack of interest prevails the singer must sing well; otherwise he might better not be there at all.

Comeliness, when added to personality, puts the singer in a fortunate place. Although people may have come primarily to hear, they find a keener relish if their visual senses are likewise pleasantly aroused. We all respond, further, to those legitimate touches which help in heightening visual effects—in short, to what is termed “showmanship.”

I have seen many a singer step upon a stage, with so little thought given to bearing, walk and subsequent pose before the piano that a negative attitude was immediately communicated to the audience—before the opening phrase had been sung.

On the other hand, I have seen a feeling of friendliness aroused in a gathering by a singer who came alertly upon the stage, and by an animated countenance and bearing prompted a general feeling that the affair was to prove genuinely enjoyable.

Whatever qualms a singer may feel before going out to face an audience, he may not disclose the slightest sign of apprehensiveness or doubt—if he is to win his assemblage. He is there to justify his artistic right to consideration; and his bearing, his countenance, and whatever bodily movements he may feel called on to indulge in his interpretations must reflect confidence in himself.

Undue movement of the body—such as twisting of the torso, or indulging in gestures of hands or arms—are out of place in either a recital or concert. There should be bodily ease, even in the erect bearing which it is good taste to preserve. There is justification, however, for a shifting of the singer's position as he sings; of turning slightly towards one side of his assemblage and thereafter to the other. There are moments, too, in climaxes, when a step forward may be appropriate; when the whole attitude conforms to the spirit of the moment.

Facial play, if it be not overdone, can be an expressive aid in conveying what the singer seeks to convey—in both text and music. As a matter of fact, the singer whose face remains passive throughout the delivery of a song is more than likely to be one who experiences very little emotional feeling. A mobile countenance can add immeasurably to the various moods of a song, and is highly desirable if not downright necessary, if a deep impression is to be made. But, to emphasize the danger in its exaggeration, I would repeat that it must not be overdone. Otherwise the effect can be just contrary to what the singer may desire.

The singer appearing as soloist with orchestra, or as a soloist in a choral concert, and forced to remain seated for considerable portions of time during the performance, should be careful of his posture and his manners. To sit slouchingly, during moments when he is not standing to sing, is not alone discourteous to his assemblage but is injurious to making his presence welcome. It is undeniably

difficult to be at ease, and not to look bored, for many idle minutes at a stretch yet it can be done; and practice in maintaining an attentive and interested concern in what is going on musically during his waits will be found to yield rewards.

Broader showmanship latitude is of course provided when the singer is appearing in opera. Since one is endeavoring to portray a character, as well as to sing the words and music allotted that character, the principal endeavor should be to stand, move, and employ gestures which are in keeping with whatever the character is supposed to do whenever he is on the stage.

Until one has acquired some experience, the tendency to over-act is difficult to subdue. One's hands and feet will seem forever too conspicuous and in the way; and to stand at ease fittingly is one of the most difficult parts of the acting-singer's job. It is possible, however, to attain repose; and, though still harder, it is not only possible but imperative for the opera singer to learn how to "listen" so expressively that his attitude and his facial play will be an important factor in any dramatic situation of which he is a part.

To portray convincingly a character, and to sing effectively at the same time, is indisputably one of the most trying tasks for any singer to undertake. Operatic history records few artists who have been equally successful in simultaneously doing both. Endeavors are tending more towards improving the acting—making it more natural,

and less given to a meaningless waving of arms—but the music has usually held the chief attention of whoever assumed the rôle, and probably always will. There is sufficient reason for this being so, for the singing portion of the task presents difficulties enough without one's attempting more on the histrionic side than can be achieved without marrying the vocal and musical portions.

As in the performance itself—whether it be concert, recital, opera, or radio—more thought can be put upon auditions than usually is given. For almost all singers approach an audition with little thought beyond doing a few songs or arias, and trusting to Providence for having done one's best.

One should ascertain, in advance, where one is to sing, and prepare the selections with a view to making them as appropriate as conditions will allow. Arranging selections which will make an effective group for an audition is one of the important elements for gaining approval. And since an audition is often more trying than an actual performance, the opening number should be one suitable to “warming up” the voice, getting the “feel” of the acoustics of the auditorium or room wherein one is singing, and of steadying the nerves. The second composition can be more of a song, with the third serving as the climax in which the target aimed at should yield a bull's-eye.

If the singer has enough of what the judges are seeking he will probably be asked to sing another song; perhaps two, or even three. When this happens it will constitute

evidence that he is being seriously considered. So—it is well to have an abundance of material ready at hand to provide whatever type of song or aria may be requested. And if the audition is for a radio program, he should have fully prepared several quasi-popular songs . . . to impress those of his musical lay listeners who respond more quickly to what they can readily grasp than to an operatic aria or art-song which so often passes completely over their heads.

The ability to “put it over,” as may have been gathered, is no simple matter for the singer. So many are the factors involved that some of the most important are not appreciated by the majority of the younger aspirants for recognition in their chosen fields. It is a case, all over again, of a little learning being dangerous.

I have sought in this book to set down—as clearly and as frankly as I could—all that impresses me as vital touching singing, singers, and singing careers. It has been my endeavor to present a word-picture that might accurately reflect what one should have, and must acquire, and finally has to face in competing for a livelihood and gaining whatever honors attach to the branch that has been chosen.

I hope that what I have written will not only prove of value to amateurs, as well as to the professionally inclined, but that it may find its way into the hands of those who contemplate supplying financial aid to those bent on having singing careers.

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